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## ITALIAN GEOECONOMIC ATTEMPTS IN CENTRAL EUROPE AND THE BALKANS DURING THE FASCIST PERIOD

### *Abstract:*

This paper gives a comprehensive description of the assumed Italian geoeconomic ideas and attempts in the direction of Central Europe and the Balkans during the Fascist period. It suspects the existence of concrete plans about creation of the Italian sphere of interests and the success of the implementation of the ideas. These presumptions are based on researches that pointed out the real interest of great powers in the region after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The paper also uses maps, graphs and statistical data to analyze the Italian geoeconomic activity in the region. Eventually, the concrete Italian ideas, and partially the success of their realization were proved. In the Italian plans, the role of the ports of Trieste and Fiume was significant. Italy finally had to politically waive the Danube Basin and focus more on the Balkans region. There were already ongoing developments in the Balkans, primarily in the case of transport and communication infrastructure, which served the Italian geoeconomic objectives in the region. The base of the initiatives was Albania, which was in personal union with the Kingdom of Italy.

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### *Key words:*

Geoeconomics, Italy, Central Europe, Balkans, Fascism

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The research of this paper is built on two statements. The first one assumes that Italy had concrete plans to gain influence in Central Europe and the Balkans with economic

tools. The second one alleges that these Italian attempts were successful, however, due to WW2 did not last for a long time. The time framework of the exploration lasts from the beginning of the Fascist regime in 1922 till the end of the leadership of Mussolini in the major part of Italy in 1943. It is important to note, that the article does not analyze the Fascist political system. In territorial terms, the article focuses on the region which before the outbreak of the world war involved the states of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Albania, Romania, and Bulgaria. This territory was a geopolitical buffer zone, between Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union. This period was quite rich in geopolitical thoughts in Italian literature. Several ideas attempt with the goal to help the Italian foreign policy in realizing a proper sphere of interest by influencing certain countries and regions. However, this paper does not wish to investigate all kinds of perspectives from the Fascist era, only the geoeconomic ones, which projected to use economic tools.

The books of Luigi Gozzini (Gozzini 1935), Giulio Sinibaldi (Sinibaldi 2010), and the articles of the contemporary Italian geopolitical journal, which existed between 1939 and 1942: *Geopolitica Rassegnamensile di geografia politica, economica, sociale, colonial*, gave an important base for the examination of this paper. Besides these sources, many other materials connecting to the fields of Geopolitics, Political Science, and History helped this research.

The article is based on the investigation of relevant scientific literature connecting to the cited fields in Italian, Hungarian, and English languages. During the preparation of this article, the focus was on the analyses of publications that described the Italian attempts to influence the countries of the observed region with economic and trade tools. This is an approach with a historical and territorial focus. Some results of the research are illustrated in designed maps in the article.

## **THE MEANING OF GEOECONOMICS**

Before starting to investigate the subject of this article, it is important to determine the concept of geoeconomics. The

terminology 'geo-economics' became widely spread at the beginning of the 1990s, after some authors, like Edward Luttwak and Pascal Lorot recognized the systematic changes in the international relations as powers started likely using economic and trade tools for influential attempts instead of classical military ones, thus geo-economics replaces geopolitics (Bernek 2018:81-83). As Luttwak stated: "If the players left in the field by the waning importance of military power were purely economic entities labor-sellers, entrepreneurs, corporations then only the logic of commerce would govern world affairs." (Luttwak 1990:18). However, besides economic relations, trading ties, and transport infrastructure developments, geo-economics connects to more other fields, like high-tech, research and development, innovation, economic intelligence, and other economic, fiscal and monetary policies (Jean 1995b:1-7; Csurgai 1998:1-4.). Although, the geo-economic thinking was much simple in the research historical period, though the existence of geo-economic thinking is thought to reality in this era, as Gyula Csurgai pointed out, economic means were used throughout the history for certain geopolitical objectives (Csurgai 2019:152), nevertheless, the many Italian geopolitical thinkers used the terminology 'geo-economia' during the 1930s and the 1940s (D.G. 1939).

## **THE INFLUENCE OF GREAT POWERS IN CENTRAL EUROPE AND THE BALKANS**

According to Luigi Gozzini, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the sectors of the economy were functionally shared, especially between the two main parts of the Empire, the Austrian Empire and the Kingdom of Hungary. Austria was dominated by industry, while the Hungarian economy was more likely agricultural. This kind of specialization created a mutual, but harmonic dependence between the two main parts of the Empire.<sup>1</sup> Even inside the Austrian Empire and the Kingdom of Hungary the different regions specialized. For example, Styria on mineral exploitation, fruit and game

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<sup>1</sup> This is demonstrated by the average trade data, as according to Gozzini the share of Austria was 72% from the exports, and 71,5% from the imports of Hungary (Gozzini, 1935:23).

production, Bohemia on the textile industry and barley production, Lower Austria on rye and sugar beet production, Moravia on coal exploitation and barley production, the alpine states of Austria on dairy production, the vicinity of Vienna on the production of legumes, Hungary on flour and sugar beet production, Galicia on swine and poultry husbandry, Bucovina on forestry, Transylvania on mining, etc (Gozzini 1935:23-39).

However, despite this economic harmony, Gozzini also echoed the centrifugal economic forces within the Empire. For example, the Hungarian industrial elite wished to be more independent from Austria, thus began to develop the industry in the Hungarian part of the Empire, especially in the territory of later Slovakia. On the other hand, this Hungarian elite feared the strengthening of German economic and political influence in Austria. For instance, the idea of the German-Austrian customs union seriously harmed their interests. The German dumped goods on the markets of Austria from year to year (Table 1).

Year	Export (Million Mark)	Import (Million Mark)
1898	672	452
1904	703	592
1909	750	770
1913	830	1100

**Table 1: Trade turnover of Austria with Germany.** Source: own editing based on the data of Gozzini (Gozzini, 1935:39).

The economic influence of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was determining in the surrounding states and was the most influential power in the Balkans (Gozzini 1935:57).

In parallel with the political collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the unified economic region and the common market were also crushed. According to Gozzini the former concept of 'Central Europe' ceased after the collapse of political unity due to the treaties of Trianon and Saint-Germain and remained only a geographical meaning (Gozzini 1935:7). These changes eventuated the unbalanced distribution of resources among the states of Central Europe. The general lack of basic food, fuels, the war damages, and the economic depletion characterized the region. These economic problems



led to strong inflation as well, which made the situation even worse. Austria, Hungary, and Bulgaria were also obligated to finance the reparations for the war. The states of the region attempted to address the economic problems with favoritism, isolationism, and the aspiration to autarky. Economic nationalism meant the strengthening of national ownership in the economy.<sup>2</sup> (Domonkos 2016:369-370). Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia also wished to minimize the trade relations with Hungary and Austria<sup>3</sup> to cut the traditional trading routes of the new territories which gravitated towards the looser states, and began to find new trading partners. This policy also forced Austria and Hungary to find new economic ties outside of the Danube region (Table 2, Table 3). The former specialization and the economic isolation led to the lack of certain products in the successor states, which also urged the governments to block exports and it led to the aspiration of autarky. This meant the development of the sectors which were not in the focus of specialization during the Austro-Hungarian era. Therefore, the industry was developed in the agrarian states, like Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia,<sup>4</sup> and the agriculture was intensified in the more industrialized states, like Austria and Czechoslovakia (Gozzini 1935:55-90).

Exporting state / Year	1923	1924	1928	1929	1930	1931
<i>Austria</i>	39.30%	36.80%	34.50%	33.90%	31.20%	29.50%
<i>Hungary</i>	69.55%	68.41%	63.60%	57.20%	53.80%	43.80%
<i>Czechoslovakia</i>	37.57%	39.25%	30.20%	30.80%	31.90%	24.80%
<i>Yugoslavia</i>	45.87%	46.08%	36.09%	40.70%	36.10%	39.20%
<i>Romania</i>	-	39.91%	35.50%	31.80%	25.40%	

**Table 2: The share of the five Danube states from the export.** Source: own editing based on the data of Gozzini (Gozzini 1935:108).

<sup>2</sup> These were characteristics especially in Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia, where many companies were bought up, which had been in Austrian, Hungarian or German hands (Gozzini 1935:57; Domonkos, 2016:370).

<sup>3</sup> The mutual trade volumes decreased significantly, however, sometimes the need for certain products urged the states of the region to merchandise, in these cases the practice based on agreements between the governments became general (Gozzini 1935:74).

<sup>4</sup> Due to the significant growth of the rural population in Hungary, Romania, and Yugoslavia the agrarian reform was also inevitable (Gozzini 1935:63, 73, 87).

Importing state / Year	1923	1924	1928	1929	1930	1931
<i>Austria</i>	41.00%	41.40%	35.50%	35.50%	38.20%	35.50%
<i>Hungary</i>	62.09%	60.21%	51.50%	48.80%	46.50%	41.90%
<i>Czechoslovakia</i>	16.71%	18.98%	17.00%	16.70%	20.00%	16.30%
<i>Yugoslavia</i>	-	-	27.40%	37.20%	30.40%	-
<i>Romania</i>	39.69%	44.94%	44.50%	43.80%	43.40%	40.30%

**Table 3: The share of the five Danube states from the import.** Source: own editing based on the data of Gozzini (Gozzini1935:108).

Although there was a partial success due to the new economic policy of the states of the region, the Great Economic Depression in 1929-1933 set back seriously the development of these states. More causes can be identified for the quite remarkable collapse of these economies. The economies of most of the countries of Central Europe and the Balkans were based and highly dependent on the export of agricultural goods. As the world market prices of food commodities suddenly dropped, these economies lost their competitiveness and their external markets. The agricultural crisis was followed by a financial crisis since 1931<sup>5</sup> (Domonkos 2016:374). The bad industrial structure and the unharmonized transport systems also aggravated the economic problems, which had already been significant even before the Great Economic Depression (Gozzini 1935:42-55).

To address the economic problems of the states of Central Europe and the Balkans, especially during the Great Depression, some ideas of economic integration appeared both from the states of the region and the great powers. However, the many times rivaling powers were almost always jealous of the other's initiatives, fearing their proper security, power, and the other's potential growing influence.

The first attempt came from France. Aristide Briand the foreign minister of France presented his plan of the economic integration of the European states based on the Pan-European idea in 1929. However, the Briand-plan was opposed by the United States of America and the Soviet Union, as they were

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<sup>5</sup> The financial crisis in Central Europe began with the collapse of the Austrian Kredit Anstalt financial institute.

left out of the initiative. Furthermore, non the European countries favored the idea. A few years later came the idea of the Austro-German Customs Union which was finally also rejected by the international community. This idea hurt the interests of France, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia from the beginning, and later Italy, Great Britain, Romania, and Yugoslavia also joined to the oppositional, and eventually, managed to prevent the creation of Austro-German cooperation. The following idea was initiated by a country of the Central European region, Czechoslovakia. The so-called 'Benes Plan' was the idea of a customs union between Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Hungary. The aim of the Benes plan was the exclusion of Germany and the Soviet Union from the Danube Basin, and the cooperation of the previous regions of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.<sup>6</sup> However, the Czechoslovak proposal was also unsuccessful. Italy and Germany rejected the idea as they suspected French economic aspires behind the creation of the cooperation. Nevertheless, the Benes plan was not welcomed by Austria and Hungary. Great Britain was not interested in interfering in the region, however, her economic influence in the Danube region was quite significant.<sup>7</sup> Due to the concerns about the potential supremacy of a rival power in the region, aiming to balance the continental great powers Great Britain also designed a plan for the economic cooperation of the states of the region. The idea was based on the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, which played an important role in the balancing foreign policy of Great Britain. According to the British plan, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Romania, and Bulgaria would have formed a duty union. The British suggestion was not accepted by Germany, Italy, and France. After the Briand plan, France designed a new initiative, which focused more on the Central European region. It was presented by the French prime minister and foreign minister André Tardieu in 1932. The Tardieu Plan aimed to solve the serious economic problems of the states of the region. Its vision was about cooperation between Austria, Czechoslovakia,

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<sup>6</sup> The Benes plan did not conclude Yugoslavia and Romania in the light of their assumed strong German affiliation (Diószegi 1997:74).

<sup>7</sup> Great Britain was the biggest investor in the region with 8597 million francs before the United States (7684 million francs) and France (3034 million francs) (Diószegi 1997:83).

Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Romania, but eventually, this plan was also rejected by the rival powers (Diószegi 1997:68-99).

Initiative	Participating states	Initiating state / supporting great power
<i>Briand Plan</i>	States of continental Europe	France
<i>Austro-German Customs Union</i>	Austria, Germany	Germany
<i>Benes Plan</i>	Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary	Czechoslovakia / France
<i>British idea</i>	Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria	Great Britain
<i>Tardieu Plan</i>	Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Romania	France

**Table 4: The different plans of economic cooperation in Central Europe between the two world wars.** Source: own editing based on the data of Diószegi (Diószegi1997:63-114).

As it was seen above, France was quite active in proposing plans aiming at the reconstruction of Central European economic unity. Besides this kind of political activity, it is also interesting to study the investment policy of the great powers in the region. During the 1920s foreign capital primarily arrived in the form of stabilization loans in Central Europe and the Balkans. This kind of loan was granted mostly by the League of Nations, however, many times economic and financial entities from Great Britain, the USA, and France, sometimes from Sweden also played a crucial role in the economic developments. Later, the bilateral financial relations became more and more significant. This kind of investment was aimed at not only economic benefits but also political, diplomatic, and strategic objectives.<sup>8</sup> The main investor in the region was Great Britain, followed by the United States of America and France after WW1. The Netherlands, Belgium, and Switzerland also can be mentioned as important investors.

<sup>8</sup> There was a solid geopolitical goal: blocking the advance of Germany and Soviet-Russia.

Endre Domonkos highlights that Great Britain and the USA did not aspire to gain strategic industrial sectors, but to find new markets for their trading goods, however, they took a significant share in the electronic, financial, naval of Danube, metallurgy, chemical, military, and oil sectors. Although France was only third behind Great Britain and the USA according to the number of investments, she had aspires for political and economic hegemony in Central Europe and the Balkans. Thus, France consciously attempted to gain important positions in the heavy industry, banking sector, metallurgy, mining, engineering, and oil sector. French investors made built the free port of Csepel in Hungary on the river of Danube (Domonkos 2016:219-239). Germany also attempted to gain positions in Central Europe and the Balkans with less success. She invested in heavy industry and mining, while boosted her trade volumes with the states of the region, especially after Hitler had come into power. However, significant economic results of the German foreign policy were only after the revisionist political decisions beginning from 1938. It is also important to note, that since 1938 Germany became the dominant economic and political power in the region (Domonkos 2017:9-20).

## **THE GEOECONOMIC ATTEMPTS OF ITALY**

After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, just like other powers, Italy also recognized the possibilities to expand her economic influence in the post-Monarchy region. These ideas from Italian thinkers correlated with the geopolitical aspirations. However, the Italian foreign policy still had not been too active until the 1930s. Nevertheless, there were some attempts to gain economic influence in Central Europe and the Balkans. The Italian Commercial Bank (Banca Commerciale Italiana) invested in the timber industry in Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Romania. Italian entities also invested in the banking sector in Hungary and the banking sector and textile industry in Poland. The 5% of investments were connected to Italian entities in Bulgaria (Domonkos 2016:231). The most significant success was reached in



Albania, as Italy reached to gain economic rights, including the oil production against Great Britain in the Balkan state. After the signing of the Italian-Albanian Treaty of Friendship in 1926, Italy managed to build a monopoly in many strategical sectors, including the financial, oil, and mining ones. (Horváth 2006:18-21). In parallel, Italy also wished to break the French dominancy in Central Europe both in political and economic terms. (Map 1).



**Map 1: The Italian-French rivalry in Central Europe. Source:** own editing.

Central Europe and the Balkans were one of the three main directions of the Italian geopolitics beyond the Mediterranean and the African territories of colonization. According to the Italian theories, the living sphere of Italy is the Mediterranean.<sup>9</sup> To prevent the interference of foreign powers in the Mediterranean, Italy has to secure the possible gateways in the Mediterranean basin. In the case of Central Europe and

<sup>9</sup> The economic factors played a significant role in the theoretical creation of the Italian living sphere (Antonsich 2009:266).

the Balkans, the Italian objective was the prevention of German and Russian advances (Map 2). Thus, Central Europe and the Balkans were crucial parts of the Italian geopolitical aspirations. The countries of the Danube basin, especially Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary formed a blocking zone against Germany in the Italian geopolitical thinking. The Danube and his affluents were important communicational routes favoring the position of Germany (Pracchi 1940:491; Jean 1995:242; Sinbaldi 2010:117-124). Poland also played an important role in the Italian geopolitical vision as a potential ally against Pan-Germanism or Pan-Slavism in the region (Fornano 2006:12). However, the borders of the planned geopolitical sphere of interests of Italy were the Carpathian Mountains (Jean 1995:242).

Italy wished to achieve these geopolitical goals with geoeconomic tools. France, the strongest power in Central Europe during the 1920s, lost her influence by the middle of the 1930s as she had suffered from inner political and economic crisis (Halecki 1952:284), while it was mentioned before, toned-up Germany gained more and more potency within Central Europe and the Balkans. The Soviet Union, in turn, preferred military power as her economy was less competitive. Thus, Roberto Pracchi stated, the only rival great power of Italy in Central Europe and the Balkans in economic terms was Germany. The Italian strategy, on one hand, aimed to increase the trade volume and the export of Italian goods to the states of the Danube basin and the Balkans. According to Pracchi, the unification with Albania<sup>10</sup> gave an important basis for the Italian economic plans. On the other hand, Italy attempted to play a crucial role in the overseas trade of the states of Central Europe and the Balkans through her ports (Pracchi 1940:491-495). Luigi Gozzini also pointed out the importance of this territory in building economic ties towards the East and the Black sea region (Gozzini 1935:109).

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<sup>10</sup> The Italian forces occupied Albania in April 1939. Later the Albanian Constitutional Assembly offered the crown to Victor Emmanuel III, forming a personal union between Italy and Albania (Horváth 2006:41).



**Map 2: The geopolitical situation of the states of the Danube Basin and the Balkan Peninsula according to the Italian theories between the two world wars.** Source: own editing.



The Italian answer to the different ideas of economic cooperation in Central Europe proposed by great powers was the so-called Brocchi Plan<sup>11</sup> which visioned a duty union between Italy, Austria, and Hungary. The Italian foreign policy managed successfully to take advantage of the rival of great powers of the region, and cooperation between Italy, Austria, and Hungary was realized. It was created officially in Rome in 1934 by the transformation of bilateral ties to a multilateral collaboration. This idea served both geopolitical and geoeconomics objectives. High representatives from the three countries met annually until 1938. On one hand, Italy attempted to weaken France in the region and block Germany by cutting the way from South Tyrol<sup>12</sup> and the Balkans. On the other hand, Italy wished to find a market for Italian goods and to boost the trade with the two other member states to strengthen the economic influence<sup>13</sup> (Réti 1998:40-110; Horváth 2006:34-38; Hamerli 2018:170-181). It can be stated, that comparing to other initiatives, the Italy-Austria-Hungary duty union was successful as it eventually was realized and working though, it did not last for a long time.

As it was mentioned one of the objectives was to make the long-distance trade of the states of Central Europe and the Balkans dependent on the service of ports of Italy. The newly-gained ports, Trieste and Fiume played the main role in this vision. Both of these ports had been important parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire for a long time, and their hinterland still were the post-Austro-Hungarian territories, thus Italy began to develop these ports.<sup>14</sup> This idea aimed primarily at the landlocked countries, Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Hungary. The Italian diplomacy attempted to strengthen the position of Trieste and Fiume in these countries. For instance, an Italian

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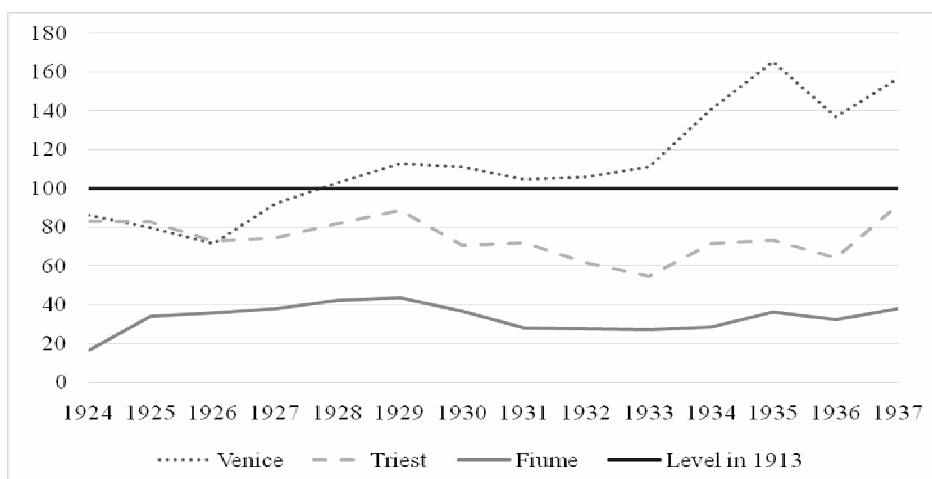
<sup>11</sup> Igino Brocchi designed the plan of the trilateral cooperation in 1929.

<sup>12</sup> The majority of the population of South Tyrol was German-speaking and earlier the territory belonged to Austria.

<sup>13</sup> Italy promised to open her market for the Austrian industrial and Hungarian agricultural products, Austria also promised to buy more agricultural goods from Hungary, while Hungary pledged to cut down the tariffs on the Italian and Austrian industrial goods. An agreement was also accepted to guarantee the priority of Italy and block the German activity in the economy of the two countries.

<sup>14</sup> Beyond the geopolitical aspiration, the development of these ports also served their integration in Italy.

agency was founded in Prague in 1925 to lobby for the trade through Trieste. Italy also offered favorable fees and made agreements with Austria and Hungary about using the two ports, Trieste (Austria) and Fiume (Hungary) (Petri 2008:18). Nevertheless, the Italian leadership grabbed every chance to oppose the protectionist trade policy of these countries (Gozzini 1935:109). However, despite these developments, the two North Adriatic ports could not overcome their turndown after the new situation created by the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the modification of borders (Chart 1).



**Chart 1: The ratio of goods turnover in the ports of Venice, Trieste and Fiume compared to the level in 1913.** Source: own editing based on the data of Rolf Petri (Petri 2008).

Beyond these difficulties, Trieste and Fiume also had to compete with other important transit ports for the Central European markets. Due to this significant trade war, Italy paid a lot of attention to the Danube natural communicational channel. As it was mentioned above the Danube connected Germany with the small states of Central Europe and the Balkans, naval rights were in the hand of Great Britain and France also had an important position, like the port of Csepel in Hungary. The Danube transport way was a strong rival of the Adriatic ports. Through this river, the overseas goods could be ported from the big ports of the Netherlands (Amsterdam, Rotterdam) and Germany (Hamburg, Bremen). The number one rival port was Hamburg, especially after the Anschluss and the

Munich treaty (Grioni 1939:165). Hamburg was the primer port in overseas trade also in the case of Bulgaria, which is the furthest country from Germany on the Danube way (Jaranoff 1940:467). Nevertheless, the Polish ports, like Gdansk and Gdynia also became concurrency for Trieste and Fiume (Cerasi 2008:50-91).

After the geopolitical changes in Central Europe, like the Anschluss, the Munich Treaty, and the outbreak of WW2, the political and economic positions of Germany had undoubtedly strengthened, excluding more and more Italy from the region.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, Mussolini and Hitler agreed about the spheres of interests in 1936. The agreement granted Germany the Northern part of the Danube basin, and Italy the Balkans (Réti 1998:85). However, the Italian analysts still studied the states of the region, like the former territories of Austria (*La Marca Orientale e i problemi economici connessi* 1939), Czechoslovakia (*Le variazioni territoriali nell'Europa Centrale e le grandi comunicazioni ferroviarie (cartina)* 1939; E. B. 1939) and Poland (*Danzica e la Vistola* 1939) and Hungary (D. G. 1939; Cametti Aspri 1940) in geoeconomic terms. The analytical maps of Mario Morandi about the Danube basin (Morandi 1939) and the Danube river (Morandi 1940) also must be highlighted.

Eventually, due to the recognition of the new situation and the new pact between Mussolini and Hitler, in which the parties reaffirmed the spheres of interests, including the right of Germany to dominate the Northern part of the Danube basin (Jean 1995:242),<sup>16</sup> Italy began to focus more on the Balkans. In economic terms, some articles from *Geopolitica* can be mentioned, which attempted to analyze the geo-economic situation to help the realization of Italian interests. One article investigates the economic and trade developments between the member states of the Balkan Pact (*Per lo sviluppo delle relazioni economiche tra paesi dell'Intesa Balcanica* 1939). Ernesto Corsi elaborated the economic characteristics and the

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<sup>15</sup> However, some opinions stated that the Munich Treaty was favorable for the Italian economic activity in the region. For example, Antonio Chianale shared this view citing the boost of certain goods (like banana) in the region through Italian mediation (Chianale 1939).

<sup>16</sup> Carlo Jean also assumed German territorial demands in Croatia and Bulgaria as corridors towards the Adriatic Sea and the Black Sea.

economic ties with Italy of Bulgaria (Corsi 1940) and the already mentioned Roberto Pracchi investigated the Italian possibilities of economic influence in the states of the Balkans (Pracchi 1940).

To reach more geoeconomic influence in the Balkans, Italy wished to develop the communication corridors, as it could make better connectivity and boost the trade volumes. In these concepts the base was Albania. Ciro Rachello made a statement about a planned highway between the Adriatic Sea and the Black Sea. This idea served the connection of Italian ports, especially Trieste with the states of the Balkans (Rachello 1939:168.). The Italian researchers knew well the great ideas of former transport projects across the Balkans by Germany (Gozzini 1935:39) and by the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (Polli 1942:318). An article of *Geopolitica* in 1940 demonstrated the evaluation of Italian projects of communication corridors in the Balkans. According to the article, the ongoing construction of the railway between the port of Durrës and Elbasan in Albania would be the first part of the greater railway between the Adriatic Sea and the other parts of the Balkans and the East. The article also underlined the junction close to Bitola, which would continue in three directions: to Skopje, Thessaloniki (Greece), and Bulgaria. Marine transport between Durrës and Italian ports and telecommunication lines between Durrës and Bari are also mentioned in the article (D. I., 1940). Bice Polli wrote about three planned major projects (Balkans railway, Adriatic railway, and the Balkans channel) which would strengthen the Italian geoeconomic influence in the Balkans (Polli 1942:319-340).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

As conclusions it can be stated that my first statement was proved, as in the literature of the historical period, and also according to the analysis of Italian foreign policy, Italy had interests and solid plans to influence Central Europe and the Balkans by using economic tools. In the Italian plans, the role of the ports of Trieste and Fiume was significant due to their

geographical position and their historical ties with Central Europe. My second statement was partially proved. It was demonstrated that only the Italian initiative based on the Brocchi Plan was realized among the ideas of different great powers, however it did not last for a long time. In this case, the Italian foreign policy successfully took an opportunity in the actual international situation. However, Italy joined the competition late, and eventually, Germany could overtake her in economic influential terms. The ports of Trieste and Fiume could not reach the planned level in the trade of the states in Central Europe and the Balkans. Moreover, Italy finally had to politically waive the Danube basin and focus more on the Balkans region. There were already ongoing developments in the Balkans, primarily for the transport and communication infrastructure, which served the Italian geoeconomic objectives in the region. The base of the initiatives was Albania, which was in personal union with the Kingdom of Italy.

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## **NOT ALL GLOBALIZATIONS ARE THE SAME: AN APPROACH TO THE CHINESE VISION**

### *Abstract:*

The concept of "globalization", which emerged rapidly with the end of the Cold War, brought with it various interpretations, depending on the actors who tried to define it independently. In this sense, the Chinese vision of globalization is generally different from that set by the West, and is based on a different conception of the global distribution of power. In this article we intend to highlight the points of contrast between the common perception in the West of the concept of globalization and that prevailing among Chinese institutions.

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### *Key words:*

Globalization; People's Republic of China; International market; Global governance

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The People's Republic of China is undoubtedly one of the actors that most influences the international political scenario, sharing this primary role with very few other subjects. With the end of the Cold War and the advent of the so-called unipolar moment, a univocal vision of the concept of globalization has emerged. Globalization – it must be specified – is not only the result of the idyllic visions or ideological hopes of one country or another, but above all a complex system of socio-economic and political relations, which has been structured thanks to the technical development of humankind, which allowed a rapid reduction in the perceived size of world spaces. In this

context, it is evident that the dominant actors have the power to impress their own interpretation on an already existing fact, that is the ever closer connection between every part of the world. So it was, for example, for the United States, but there is no doubt that the European Union for example has its own vision of what globalization is or should be. With China's economic rise, the Asian giant has also been shown to have its own standalone vision of what globalization is and should be. In Xi Jinping's 2017 speech in Davos these visions emerged explicitly, but obviously they were already present in a nutshell in the Chinese perspective. It becomes important today to consider the different perspectives that the main actors take on the key concepts that govern international relations in order to be aware of the real impact of their political perspective, which then has evident repercussions on the world chessboard.

In this article our aim is to show, through the crossing of some declarations of the high Chinese institutional spheres, the reading of the global transformations of some analysts, and the economic-political theses expressed by the People's Republic of China, what is the practice of globalization that the Asian country wants to develop. First of all, this will prove how the concept of globalization is not unique, and secondly it will be useful for understanding the Chinese vision of the best possible condition, given the premises, of world international relations. In this sense, the world view, political-cultural assumptions, and structural economic elements converge towards a specific perspective, namely the Chinese one, which we want to approach with this study.

## **GLOBALIZATION: AN INCREASINGLY DEBATED CONCEPT**

When we talk about globalization, we frequently have a single model of globalization in mind. In reality, the model of globalization proposed in the West is only one of these. With the appearance of an era of greater plurality in international politics, where the increase in the capacity of global trade is exponential, and where the intersection of peoples and cultures is in many ways at historic highs, interpretations of this also increase concept. We are used to reading reality with our

interpretative tools, but new actors on the global scenario also have their narrative skills and constantly promote their vision of things.

The case of China is certainly emblematic, where we want to understand the plurality of interpretations that the term globalization assumes in the world. It is true that, to date, even in the West the term has become more polysemic, due to an ever greater fragmentation of the discourse. The Chinese case, however, helps us to better understand how this can happen for other peoples and cultures, since this country has the strength in all respects to strongly affect the processes of globalization. This is given by the political scope of its regional and global influence, but above all by its positioning in the world value chain, as well as by the weight of its economy, currently the second in the world after that of the USA. Between 2019 and 2020, however, we started talking about the "new cold war" between the United States and the People's Republic of China, a gloomy forecast of analysts and journalists. Whether this will prove to be true or not, we can point out that however this term makes it clear how the main actors of the global scenario are precisely the United States and China. This is so true not only from an economic point of view, but in function of their own military expenditure and of many other factors that can influence this consideration, and which follow logically.

During the Cold War, it was Kenneth Waltz, on the basis of the realist school, who developed the concept of "polarity" to reflect on an absolutely new condition of world political reality: bipolarity (Waltz 1964). Bipolarism itself is, in a way, a type of globalization. It was based on an international order, that of Yalta, which although dividing the world into spheres of influence (which Waltz will conceive of as "poles"), tried to exclude dangerous alternatives to the existing balance. One of the examples is that of China, which for Stalin and the Soviet Union should not have immediately established itself as a socialist state, but rather remained under the aegis of the Nationalist Party, the Kuomintang, so as to be one of those "Bourgeois democracies" that would have collaborated with the USSR. In other words, bipolarism was based on the Yalta

agreements, and a type of globalization with more than one ruler was proposed in Yalta.

We can also remember how the Soviet Union itself had an autonomous globalization project. It was that of socialist globalization, based on the assumption of proletarian internationalism. According to this thesis, first the class struggle should have been “globalized”, creating a worldwide workers alliance, and after the communist revolutions the planetary resources should have been centrally managed as far as possible. This concept of globalization probably did not foresee the extinction of nationalities, as can be read in some Communist literature, but in any case it promoted that concept of “future humanity” worldwide that was sung to the notes of the “Internationale”<sup>1</sup>.

On the other hand, it is needless to say that the United States itself had a very particular conception of globalization, which would have consisted in the global extension of the market economy, and with it liberal freedoms. What is commonly referred to as “globalization” today is often a way of indicating the western pattern of globalization that became predominant after the defeat of the Soviet Union in the Cold War. With this obviously competitors have not disappeared to this model of globalization, but it must be said that the latter can be of two fundamental types: those who oppose this globalization, and that basically they do not want the continuation of any globalization process (think for example of the defenders of the nation state in a perspective strongly linked to the twentieth century); and those who agree to deepen the progress of the path of globalization, but guiding it in different directions than the one prepared by the West. The latter are some emerging countries, which have their own specific (and not necessarily concordant) idea of how globalization should be, and the People's Republic of China is one of them.

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<sup>1</sup> Although the specific concept is present in the French, English and Chinese versions of the song, in the Italian version there is the explicit wording “future humanity”.

## **XI'S VISION**

Xi Jinping's speech at the Davos Forum in 2017 was, from this point of view, illuminating. But before introducing ourselves to the fundamental issues of what Xi Jinping said on that occasion, it is useful to give a minimum of context. One of the main topics of Donald Trump's election campaign in 2016 was precisely the role that China played within the world value chain, and what this meant for American interest. The main thesis, very popular in reality among the Republicans, was that China, expanding its influence thanks to the international market, and focusing especially on the primary sector, could have been too dangerous a competitor for the USA. This thesis was actually not entirely new, and is repeated with a certain cyclicity according to the political needs of the White House. Even the presidency of Bush Jr., for example, has seen some critical approach towards China with respect to the international scenario. But what gave Xi Jinping the opportunity to express himself in a certain way in Davos was that process initiated by Trump which has been called "the tariff war", that is a series of protectionist measures initiated by the United States, and who received replies from China, which were aimed at damaging the Chinese economy, as well as developing their own. This marries, moreover, a certain "ideological" program of the Trump presidency, developed together with more or less explicit advisers, which has been called "fight against globalism".

Globalism, which might seem to be synonymous with "globalization" – and in some ways it is – does not, however, also have a clear definition. It has a certain meaning in Europe, linked to counterculture, and describes a sort of ideology of globalization aimed at the uniformization of peoples and cultures to a single world model. This would imply, according to this interpretation, a cultural deprivation, a loss of sovereignty by the existing political entities, and would usually be promoted through the means of political, military and financial imperialism. In Trump's language, which surely may have recovered and revised some countercultural concepts, the

term "globalism" goes rather to highlight the existence of a whole series of international institutions or a certain humanitarian attitude that would serve to compress the American interest and prevent it to make yourself explicit. It is true how often, in the European countercultural narrative, international institutions are accused as "globalist", but this happens in function of their hypothetical collusion with the political and military potentates who promote these imperialist and unifying aims. In the case of the Trumpian narrative, "globalism" would rather be what, by placing the emphasis on international concertation, on mediation between the parties, on cooperation between countries, prevents the USA from fully expressing its power in the world, rather than its own internal sovereignty, which is instead the main interest of the European "anti-globalists". Already this dichotomy testifies to a terminological ambiguity in an apparent synonymy definition of "globalization" that must be absolutely taken into consideration. As we are seeing, these concepts, which we often use with little attention, are far from neutral or devoid of nuances of meaning that can change their content almost entirely.

It is precisely in relation to this type of narrative that Xi Jinping has expressed himself, surprising, however, a good part of the world audience, who probably has not yet grasped these conceptual passages. He, in Davos, defended the concept of "globalization", but in doing so he also managed to define it. Some words of great interest for the purposes of the examination are these:

*«Some blame economic globalization for the chaos in the world. Economic globalization was once viewed as the treasure cave found by Ali Baba in The Arabian Nights, but it has now become the Pandora's box in the eyes of many. The international community finds itself in a heated debate on economic globalization.*

*Today, I wish to address the global economy in the context of economic globalization.*

*The point I want to make is that many of the problems troubling the world are not caused by economic globalization. For instance, the refugee waves from the Middle East and North*

*Africa in recent years have become a global concern. Several million people have been displaced, and some small children lost their lives while crossing the rough sea. This is indeed heartbreaking. It is war, conflict and regional turbulence that have created this problem, and its solution lies in making peace, promoting reconciliation and restoring stability. The international financial crisis is another example. It is not an inevitable outcome of economic globalization; rather, it is the consequence of excessive chase of profit by financial capital and grave failure of financial regulation. Just blaming economic globalization for the world's problems is inconsistent with reality, and it will not help solve the problems.*

*From the historical perspective, economic globalization resulted from growing social productivity, and is a natural outcome of scientific and technological progress, not something created by any individuals or any countries. Economic globalization has powered global growth and facilitated movement of goods and capital, advances in science, technology and civilization, and interactions among peoples.*

*But we should also recognize that economic globalization is a double-edged sword. When the global economy is under downward pressure, it is hard to make the cake of global economy bigger. It may even shrink, which will strain the relations between growth and distribution, between capital and labor, and between efficiency and equity. Both developed and developing countries have felt the punch. Voices against globalization have laid bare pitfalls in the process of economic globalization that we need to take seriously.*

*As a line in an old Chinese poem goes, "Honey melons hang on bitter vines; sweet dates grow on thistles and thorns." In a philosophical sense, nothing is perfect in the world. One would fail to see the full picture if he claims something is perfect because of its merits, or if he views something as useless just because of its defects. It is true that economic globalization has created new problems, but this is no justification to write economic globalization off completely. Rather, we should adapt to and guide economic globalization, cushion its negative impact, and deliver its benefits to all countries and all nations.*

*There was a time when China also had doubts about economic globalization, and was not sure whether it should join*



*the World Trade Organization. But we came to the conclusion that integration into the global economy is a historical trend. To grow its economy, China must have the courage to swim in the vast ocean of the global market.» (Xi 2017).*

In these statements we immediately see how Xi wants to differentiate two types of globalization: one enriches peoples, the other puts them in crisis. Curiously, however, both have something to do with the market. It is clear from the first lines how the globalization that Xi Jinping wants to defend, and which is in fact the one that for China produces the highest possible level of well-being, is that of the international market. The idea behind this theory is the famous one by David Ricardo, which he made explicit with the concept of “comparative advantage” (Ricardo 2012). Notoriously, Ricardo systematized the principle that two countries with a different amount of resources and capital, being differently favored in producing some goods more than others, would find greater satisfaction of their needs by trading with each other. This kind of push, which leads two countries to trade, obviously leads all nations to do so, and this results in the framework of world trade. This thesis, for a long time, has seen some opposition in the so-called socialist camp. This is true if we consider how communist ideology has a certain aversion to the reality of the market. Xi Jinping himself highlighted, in the speech, how China has for years seen the opening to the international market in a negative way. In fact, this opening could have threatened the country's political stability, as well as the socialist institutions that it had given itself with the Mao revolution.

In contrast, over time, openness to the international market has also become one of the building blocks of the doctrines of so-called neoliberalism. Indeed, it was for this reason that many analysts viewed China's presence favorably on the scene of a world globalized by the economy. This would have meant that China was entering within a world unity where the market would have represented the mediator, but also the ultimate goal. Even earlier, the market reforms launched by Deng Xiaoping had given some hope to the West, whose concept of globalization has long been linked to the



economic-commercial channel. In addition, the US attempted to make China a diplomatic partner in the Cold War against the Soviet Union.

Certainly Deng Xiaoping's market reforms were a welcome element for the United States of America, as well as a step forward in the construction of contemporary China. What did not happen in China, however, was a scenario similar to the subsequent one of liberalization in Russia. China and Russia can probably represent two different models of integration within the international market, even if the strong corrections implemented after the Yeltsin presidency have in fact changed the tables.

## **STATE AND ECONOMY IN CHINESE GLOBALIZATION**

If it is true that China has opened itself, ambivalently, to international and domestic trade, this has always happened under strict control of the state apparatus. This means that these processes have been defined according to precise strategies and thanks to control tools that prevented market forces from derailing with respect to political purposes. This is very different from projects such as that of European functionalism, according to which greater economic cohesion between countries would have led to profound political transformations. By this we do not mean that China is a country that cannot change or that does not change with respect to the historical phases in which it lives, far from it. Rather, we want to argue that this is mutually operated organically in the national interest and in the ideology of the political apparatus, and not produced by the “creative destruction” of the market.

As mentioned, however, China has for some time been adverse to any form of economic globalization. Obviously it shared the communist ideal of the world unity of the working class, but its reading, which was also called “national-communist”, distanced it from the concept of “socialism in one country” developed in the Soviet Union under the government by Stalin. The idea of the People's Republic of China was that according to which every nation should find its way to

independence and socialism, without external interference. To do this, it was necessary to develop a trade between subordinate countries – South-South trade – which also took place according to the modalities of the mere exchange of materials and products.

The current vision of China, however, as remarked in Davos' speech, is that according to which a globalization, the Ricardian one, produces wealth and well-being. The other globalization, which however does not deviate from the international economic exchange model, produces misery and crisis due to precise political choices and obvious flaws in governance. From this, the tragedy of refugees, economic crises like that of 2008 and so on would descend. The alternative that China proposes is clearly a model difference, so that states and international institutions finally take on the task not of denying, but of leading globalization.

This, to be honest, is expressed with a typically Marxist approach, that is, with the dialectical approach. It is indeed possible to see between the lines this duality of which we have spoken, but the way in which it is proposed is of a dialectical type, that is, it develops in stages. What Xi Jinping reiterates in more than one passage of Davos' speech is that globalization produces a whole series of problems, but basically the advantages outweigh them in qualitative terms. It would therefore be necessary to deal with the questions opened by globalization and resolve them, without however abolishing globalization itself. In summary, this is the same approach that Marx adopted, in the *Communist Manifesto*, towards capitalism (Marx, Engels 2014), which itself had at its core the prodromes of current globalization, producing ever greater deterritorialization phenomena.

The entry of China into the WTO, its important presence on the international trade scene, have raised it to a so to speak constitutive factor in this area, but the economy and commerce are not the only voice for which China proposes a change of orientation, or at least feeds different ideas towards the West. One of the aspects that follow the premises we have discussed is that of global equity. The place that China gives to the concept of equity and sharing is very important, and is

expressed, among other things, in the concepts of profit redistribution and social stability.

*«We should strike a balance between efficiency and equity to ensure that different countries, different social strata and different groups of people all share in the benefits of economic globalization. The people of all countries expect nothing less from us, and this is our unshirkable responsibility as leaders of our times» (Xi 2017).*

However, this attention does not only affect the social strata, but also the relationship between states and people. Greater redistribution of wealth pairs with greater redistribution of power. China on the one hand is a strong promoter of a multipolar international order, on the other, being part of the Security Council, it supports the constructive action of the United Nations and the cooperation between states.

In other words, it is strongly in favor of the cooperative elaboration of governance strategies and their application. It is also critical of all those phenomena that steal sovereignty from States, depriving them of decision-making power and therefore of rationalizing capabilities. For China, national sovereignty is one of those principles that cannot be affected by market forces.

The multipolarity advocated by China, proposed with it by other States such as India and Russia, represents the idea that it is important to have in mind how other actors in the world must coexist with the one currently main, and that any form of hegemonism creates general disadvantages that are not acceptable. After all, the “bad globalization” of which Xi Jinping warned us in Davos is precisely that dictated by a certain hegemonism, which risks also undermining the subsistence bases of the first world power.

To describe this phenomenon, Xi Jinping has recovered the concept of “Thucydides' trap”. The latter is the concept of international relations whereby two geopolitical powers, one hegemonic and the other on the rise, will tend to clash because of the fear of losing the dominion (Allison 2017). This of course is most problematic for Chinese decision-makers, and must be

absolutely avoided. Any clash between these two powers could actually create great disruptions from the point of view of the stability of a system where, willy-nilly, more players now act. China proposes, precisely with regard to this reality which it finds itself influencing with its own existence<sup>2</sup>, a system of greater concertation, whose main challenge is to operate as far as possible synthesis between the different parties.

## **MULTIPOLARIZATION AND INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

As noted by Stuenkel, it is the BRICS group that proposes a decentralization of global power, through a global political alliance that has consolidated over time (Stuenkel 2015), despite long-standing open questions between some of its countries (we speak clearly of India and China). With the beginning of the so-called unipolar phase dictated by the implosion of the Soviet Union, these countries have in fact made ever greater alliances, also determined by the desire to see their decisions respected in an increasingly monochromatic world. This also led to a multiplication of possibilities for actors crushed or almost by bipolar confrontation, in which it was difficult to actually remain unaligned. Furthermore, this also guaranteed a de facto ideological victory for China, which has been able to demonstrate the validity of some of its theses on national independence and political autonomy. Indeed, returning to the discourse on mutation and adaptation capabilities, the People's Republic has been able to demonstrate how a more flexible approach to economic issues could guarantee greater chances of survival and development than those of the Soviet Union.

In this sense, the project of the BRICS and therefore of China has been interpreted as aimed at a specific type of systemic change. This change, however, is not aimed at the

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<sup>2</sup> «China has not only benefited from economic globalization but also contributed to it. Rapid growth in China has been a sustained, powerful engine for global economic stability and expansion.»

Xi Jinping, *Speech at the World Economic Forum, Davos 2017*, The People's Republic of China – The State Council Information Office:

[http://www.china.org.cn/node\\_7247529/content\\_40569136.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/node_7247529/content_40569136.htm)

complete reversal of the world political structure, but at its rebalancing in a polyarchic sense.

*«Delegitimizing rhetoric may indeed be a precondition for the creation of an anti-hegemonic coalition, yet it is not entirely clear that delegitimation inevitably leads to anti-hegemonic behavior. Looking at the BRICS' current rhetoric, one may instead come to believe that anti-systemic rhetoric meant to delegitimize the hegemon seeks to satisfy a nationalist domestic public, and thus serve as a substitute for actual balancing behavior. When looking at the BRICS' behavior, it becomes clear that they are far more status-quo oriented than their rhetoric suggests.» (Stuenkel 2015).*

Of course, it is important to understand which status quo you are talking about. The defense of a world order constituted by the BRICS, and China with them, is certainly not the stance in favor of the present world conditions. Rather, according to the “dialectical” principle enunciated by Xi Jinping in Davos, it is the need to carry out reforms in accordance with the general interest rather than deconstructing a whole system that has instead proven to have many positive characteristics. In a multipolar system hypothesized by these countries, in fact, the West – or rather the two worlds that compose it: the Anglosphere and Western Europe – would also have their role, but first of all included within their space bed , and secondly equal to other similar geographic-political entities.

*«Emerging powers challenge the notion that Western norms are superior to those of the rest of the world» (Stuenkel 2015).* This in effect is the cultural link that united the political practice of the BRICS with the national needs of the once politically subordinated peoples. In fact, this type of narrative is very present, in different ways, both in China, in Latin America, in India, in Africa, and in Russia. This determines an anti-hegemonic attitude which, in reality, does not mean subversion. These countries, fueled by more or less sustained growth rates, want to recognize their space in the world, which means first of all their ability to be able to determine their own internal political choices, often harshly criticized by the West.

Megan Dee describes the current phase of world politics with these words, underlining their high level of problems:

*«There is little doubt that the world is a very different place today than it was 30, 20 or even 10 years ago. The end of the Cold War was to bring with it both shrinking borders and new power brokers; closer interdependence and greater global insecurities. Globalisation has brought the abroad ever closer to home. Power is diffuse. Gone are the days when the 'West' could dictate policy and shape the world in its own image. The world of today is instead witnessing the rise of new and diverse global powers capable of wielding influence in both global markets and global governance. [...] Multilateralism has become increasingly difficult, yet never more important. Diplomacy has a renewed significance. This is an emerging multipolar world.» (Dee 2015).*

For China, the problem caused by the existence of hegemonic political entities becomes precisely the impossibility of operating a better multilateral policy, which in this period instead is of perhaps greater importance than at any other historical moment, given the very serious global consequences that war or economic crises produce in a globalized world. The global health emergency of Covid-19, moreover, was a proof of how the crises today reverberate on a global scale at an unparalleled speed, and of how the interconnection between elements of problematic also requires interconnection of responses.

These principles necessarily lead to a positive consideration of world intergovernmental institutions and pre-existing governance mechanisms. They belong to what is positive in the so-called "globalization", according to China. In many ways, they themselves guarantee the process of deepening multilateralism, for which they were actually born, and which China is looking for. The state of affairs regarding the issue of effective multilateralism within intergovernmental organizations is roughly this:

*«Further informal recognition of the status of the emerging economies as rising power brokers in international institutions has been the increasing acceptance by the 'Big Two' – the United*



*States and the EU – that they can no longer achieve all that they want globally without taking into account the preferences of other powers<sup>3</sup>. The unilateralism that marked US foreign policy in the early 2000s has subsequently begun to be replaced by a renewed focus upon multilateral methods of decision-making and support for international institutions<sup>4</sup>. The EU has also recognised the growing influence of the emerging economies and the need to work with them as partners in furthering ‘effective multilateralism’<sup>5</sup>. Similar recognition is also being afforded the emerging economies in the increasing frequency of calls for formal reforms of the United Nations and international economic institutions to better reflect the new balance of global power<sup>6</sup>. [...] Thus, while the formal structures of today’s global governance reflect little plurality between the world’s major economies, informally the emerging economies are gaining in recognition and informal status as power brokers within today’s systems of global governance.» (Dee 2015).*

This is the scenario in which this project of “democratization of international relations” hoped for by China<sup>7</sup>, and other emerging powers fits. The joint declaration of the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation of

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<sup>3</sup> Gilford John Ikenberry, Michael Mastanduno, William C. Wohlforth, *Introduction: Unipolarity, state behavior and systemic consequences*, in *World Politics*, vol. 61 no. 1 y. 2008, p. 16 [author's reference].

<sup>4</sup> White House, *National Security Strategy*, 2010, pp. 12-13:  
[http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss\\_viewer/national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf)  
[author's reference].

<sup>5</sup> Council of the European Union, *Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy – Providing Security in a Changing World*, Brussels, 11<sup>th</sup> December 2008, p. 11 [author's reference].

<sup>6</sup> Richard Gowan, *Asymmetrical Multilateralism: The BRICS, the US, Europe and the Reform of Global Governance*, in Thomas Renard & Sven Biscop [edited by], *The European Union and Emerging Powers in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: How Europe can Shape a New Global Order*, Ashgate, Farnham 2012, pp. 165-184; Shaun Breslin, *China's emerging global role: Dissatisfied great power*, in *Politics*, vol. 30 no. 1 y. 2010, pp. 52-62; Paulo Sotero, *Brazil's rising ambition in a shifting global balance of power*, in *Politics*, vol. 30 no. 1 y. 2010, pp. 71-81; Michael Zürn & Matthew Stephens, *The view of old and new powers on the legitimacy of international institutions*, in *Politics*, vol. 30 no. 1 y. 2010, pp. 91-101. [Author's references].

<sup>7</sup> *Joint Declaration of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China*, Moscow, 26<sup>th</sup> March 2007:  
[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/2649\\_665393/t309361.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/t309361.shtml)

26<sup>th</sup> March 2007 explores the meaning of what “multilateralism” would mean for these countries:

*«Countries should work together to resolve the problems facing the international community. [Operational principles should be] the firm establishment of widely recognized principle of decision through consensus and coordination mechanism in international affairs [,] cooperation with other countries to uphold stability and security at all levels and on all fronts and create favorable conditions for sustainable development [,] promote multilateralism and democracy in international relations, respect the primacy of international law and work to establish a harmonious world of enduring peace and common prosperity. The diversity of cultures and civilizations in the world should be maintained, and initiatives and actions for promoting inter-civilization dialogue should be encouraged.»*

We will return to the principle of inter-civilization dialogue later. However, it is important to note that, as mentioned, this document underlines the importance of supporting world conditions that can guarantee balanced development, according to a model of greater international equity. The role of pre-existing international institutions becomes clear when it is announced that:

*«[The] cooperation under the UN framework is a guarantee for advancing [...] interests, namely, to strengthen the role of the United Nations and the central status of the UN Security Council in upholding world peace and security. [The] reform of the United Nations should be based on the broadest consensus among its member states. It is very important for the two countries to strengthen coordination in the reform of the world body.»*

To put it with Stuenkel:

*«while the BRICS Summits may be understood as an exercise of delegitimization of global order, there is no clear indicator that BRICS members are truly interested in adopting any tangible measures to undermine global order—and yet, they will*



*increasingly limit the United States' capacity to claim special rights in it.»* (Stuenkel 2015).

Simone Dossi, on the other hand, notes in his essay on China's maritime doctrine that China is interested in creating coordination between the major maritime powers to defend international waters from threats to civil and commercial security (Dossi 2018). If we consider maritime connections as the development of a “technical globalization”, or rather the fundamental structure necessary for the definition of the unity of the terrae orbis, then we see how also in this case a typical attitude of the Chinese vision of international relations is reproduced. However, this goes without contradictions to a fortification of its navy in defense of its national and territorial interests. Ultimately, it would have no interest in wanting to replace the United States on the seas, but would rather assist them in promoting an increasingly peaceful and safe maritime environment. This search for balance and stability can be used to read every aspect of globalization related to Chinese interpretation.

Not only acceptance, but also the updating and promotion of the role of already existing intergovernmental bodies is therefore the fundamental figure of the Chinese idea of globalization. To date, the latter are experiencing a crisis with a strong global impact as the space that emerging countries take up inside becomes problematic for the maintenance of North American hegemony.

The United Nations is the logical continuation of the structure of the League of Nations, strongly desired by the American President Woodrow Wilson. The latter, also known as the League of Nations in Germany, had some contradictions according to some already in its programs. The interpretation of the German jurist Carl Schmitt, for example, exposed some interpretative problems for words such as “internationality” and “interstatuality”. In fact, he already noted this after the First World War:

*«As a result of the 1919 Paris peace treaties an incongruous organization came into existence-the Geneva establishment, which is called in German Völkerbund (in French, Société des*

*Nations and English, the League of Nations) but should properly be called a society of nations. This body is an organization which presupposes the existence of states, regulates some of their mutual relations, and even guarantees their political existence. It is neither universal nor even an international organization. If the German word for international is used correctly and honestly it must be distinguished from interstate and applied instead to international movements which transcend the borders of states and ignore the territorial integrity, impenetrability, and impermeability of existing states as, for example, the Third International. Immediately exposed here are the elementary antitheses of international and interstate, of a depoliticalized universal society and interstate guarantees of the status quo of existing frontiers. It is hard to comprehend how a scholarly treatment of the League of Nations could skirt this and even lend support to this confusion. The Geneva League of Nations does not eliminate the possibility of wars, just as it does not abolish states. It introduces new possibilities for wars, permits wars to take place, sanctions coalition wars, and by legitimizing and sanctioning certain wars it sweeps away many obstacles to war.» (Schmitt 2007).*

This nature still open to the possibility of conflict, although conducted by other means and other legitimations, has so far had different orientations. According to critics of North American hegemony, the humanitarian universalism professed by international institutions has often been helpful in the political pursuits of the United States. To date, the United Nations still plays a primary role in a political standoff where it is considered by the United States, or at least by the Trump presidency, to be a “condescending” institution towards the People's Republic of China. The role that the People's Republic of China play as member of the Security Council have moved these institutions towards a greater opening of the same to non-monochromatic perspectives, progressing towards the ideal that had been promoted to their foundation. Yet, they did not produce universal concord, as Schmitt pointed out, also obviously their role has been of great help in solving many world problems and in compressing the possibilities of conflict. The “struggle”, however, has moved within them, as a context

of diplomatic confrontation between emerging and hegemonic countries.

## **THE CONCEPT OF CHINESE GLOBALIZATION IN PRACTICE**

The global health emergency raised by Covid-19 has highlighted all these elements, accelerating the processes already underway. With this global crisis, the Trump presidency has underlined its opinion on this institution, in the special capacity of the WHO, in its opinion too close to the Chinese demands. China's challenge of "democratizing" the United Nations encounters many obstacles in this regard, nevertheless it represents its vision of how international institutions should drive globalization. Globalization, as we have said, is a term with various nuances, various meanings and various interpretations, and this is the project of China's institutional globalization.

The problem of interstatuality, raised by Schmitt after the First World War, that is, when this concept became politically relevant, is addressed by China with the aforementioned principle of multilateralism. The latter in fact promotes peace between countries and political entities, but according to a realistic perspective of limiting the conflict, starting from recognized bases of cultural and decision-making difference. In many ways this problem was already anticipated by the Maoist reading of the question of internationalism, in a perspective quite different from the Stalinist and Soviet one, according to which the peoples should have developed according to their own autonomous historical paths. This realistic, pluralist corrective was in many ways an anticipation of the multilateral approach, expressed however in this case in the perspective of internationalism rather than in that of interstate. It is evident that these principles constitute long-term guidelines of Chinese thought and practice.

It is no coincidence therefore that the principle of civilization and coexistence between civilizations has been widely promoted by emerging countries, especially in the dialogue between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China. In fact, these two states have structured,

together with some Central Asian countries, and keeping other countries including Iran among observers, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

*«Over time, the SCO is becoming more and more an area of strategic-military and economic-commercial cooperation, in which the weight of China emerges predominantly. Not only on the political-cultural level – the principles continuously affirmed by Beijing of "non-interference", "non-alignment", "openness to the world" and "mutual respect"<sup>8</sup> have been included, for example, in the Constitutional Charter of the SCO – but also for as regards infrastructure construction, cross-border economic cooperation programs and joint military maneuvers. Moreover, bearing in mind that in 2005 India, Iran, Pakistan and Mongolia became observers of the SCO, in the near future we could deal with the largest regional organization in the world, which, without the direct participation of the USA, would include the two most dynamic economies on the planet and some significant nuclear powers.» (Parenti 2009).*

The guiding principle of the SCO, as often reiterated by the official documents of the participating countries, is that of comparison and mutual recognition between distinct civilizations<sup>9</sup>. The concept of civilization, however, while incorporating the existence of national identities, does not correspond entirely to it. Indeed, it goes beyond nationalities towards larger groups of peoples and cultures. To respond to the principle of confrontation and mutual recognition between civilizations, the most suitable institutional framework seems to be that of the great regional alliances, of which the SCO is only one of them. A greater regionalization of world power, which does not contravene a stable international order, would act according to China precisely as a rebalancer of the problems relating to the centralization of weight in a single geographical, economic and strength point.

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<sup>8</sup> These too are guiding principles of Chinese globalization.

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. *Joint Declaration of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China*, Moscow, 26<sup>th</sup> March 2007:

[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/2649\\_665393/t309361.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/t309361.shtml)

Indeed, the SCO also corresponds to a small model of how, according to China, international institutions should work. It becomes clear that the SCO model is the multilateral model that the countries who participate in it would like to implement as much as possible also in the United Nations.

The People's Republic of China is already, by its constitution, a multinational state. Various ethnic groups participate in it, similarly to the Russian Federation which instead welcomes various religions and traditional groups within it. The Chinese scholar Zhang Weiwei defines this paradigm as that of the civilizational state, an innovative model of statehood that blends the demands of the modern nation-state with that of the civilization-state:

*«China is already a civilizational state, which amalgamates the nation-state and the civilization-state, and combines the strength of both. This fact itself is a miracle, highlighting the Chinese civilization's known capacity and tradition for creating synergies.»* (Zhang 2011).

Civilizations can be, for the Chinese globalization model, guiding concepts for the creation of a mosaic of alliances and regional organizations, which can support a more solid structure of international relations. But this is not the role of the civilization principle alone. Just as mutual recognition of the history of nations was once one of the key elements of diplomacy, so for countries that promote the concept of civilization as a current political principle, becoming aware of the plurality of these civilizations and their historical relationships obviously dictated also by geographic dimension.

Finally, the picture is completed with the large infrastructure projects that China has launched or is launching in this historical period. We must never forget how globalization is also the ability to communicate between distant places and the ever faster connection between spaces. These things in turn encourage both the contact between minds and knowledge and the development of trade, which thus guarantees the opening of new markets. In history these two elements rarely did not coincide. The most important Chinese project in this regard remains that of the Belt and Road

Initiative, which represents China's new ambitions as a promoter of integration and economic development. Its continental railways and port connections will connect, in Chinese projects, the great Asian country to Italian cities, such as Venice.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Openness towards the advantages of globalization, promotion of intercultural exchange, positivity towards the international market, trust in international institutions and promotion of their ever greater implementation, multilateral approach, role of the State as an ordering element of modern potential, conception of “civilization” as promoter of a widespread mosaic of regional organizations, wide-ranging infrastructure projects: all these elements make up a very specific conceptual framework, which defines the Chinese idea of globalization. Very complex legacies intervene on this, sometimes even ancestral, others simply deriving from recent history, but above all responding to the present conditions of a constantly changing world. The Chinese approach is as important as its global weight, and places us in the perspective of studying having to compare ourselves with those who have an objective influence on the present reality to which the West contributes too. From this derives a more complete vision of the world and a deeper understanding of the nature of globalization.

The opinion of the People's Republic of China is that globalization is primarily an emerging phenomenon predominantly of an economic nature, and it must therefore be regulated like any phenomenon of this type. The Chinese approach is twofold, when it sees risks and opportunities in globalization. In this sense, there is a doubling between globalization as a structural fact and what globalization could be positive, guiding its processes towards a defined (and, in this case, shared) purpose. It is impossible not to notice the classic Marxist dialectical and “materialistic approach behind this way of thinking. Dialectically, globalization is a contradictory but potentially positive phenomenon: its



negativities and its excesses can be reversed into advantages and opportunities if only one has the decision-making power to take the reins. “Materialistic” because it is possible to divide it into a structural fund of a techno-economic nature and a superstructural interpretation. Finally, the idea that the birth of a disruptive historical movement creates opportunities to be exploited is another element to consider in the characterization of Chinese political thought. In taking into consideration the US vision of the concept of globalization, we have not greatly taken into account every interpretative variable of the given concept in other geopolitical spheres, and it would be appropriate to continue this analysis in this sense. Understanding worldviews is one of the moments needed to understand the world.

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## THE PERSPECTIVES OF TRANSNISTRIA IN THE LIGHT OF RUSSIAN INVASION ON UKRAINE

### *Abstract:*

The pro-Russian self-declared separatist state of Transnistria was formed in the years following the fragmentation of USSR, which set the new socio-political grounds of contemporary global geopolitics. Transnistrian conflict remained frozen for thirty years and acted as one of many Russian satellites in the region. In the light of ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war the importance of Transnistria may increase significantly and become a source of further tensions in Eastern Europe. While Transnistria is “de jure” considered as part of Moldova it “de facto” functions as independent country under the protection of Russian “peacekeeping” mission. The role of Transnistria in the conflict has yet to reveal itself but recent events show that the tensions are escalating and it is very likely that the country will be directly dragged in the war. The goal of this essay is to analyze the past geopolitical development of Transnistria and evaluate its potential role in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. After three decades the nature and importance of Transnistria is changing and it may prove to be one of the crucial subjects at defining the future of Eastern European geopolitics.

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### *Key words:*

Transnistria, Moldova, Russo-Ukrainian war, Russian geopolitical interests

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## **INTRODUCTION**

After the enormous socio-political transformations of the 20th century – which pulled the continent into two world wars, a long period of polarization during the cold war and political fragmentation of the socialist countries at the beginning of the 90s, Europe has entered new millennium as a relatively

peaceful continent with well-defined political borders and flourishing international relations. Integration of the »European core«, now stretching all the way from the Atlantic coasts to the large open plains of Eastern Europe, is (was?) a story of exemplary cooperation between countries and building of strong transnational organization that functions as one of the main political, economic and cultural powers of the world. European Union had its fundamentals laid in the years following the Second World War, when the western part of the continent united its efforts towards common goals. European Economic Community (EEC) also played a counterpart to the socialist regimes behind the iron curtain. The fall of communism in the eastern block drastically changed the political map of Europe and opened her eastern regions to the processes of European integration. In the years 2004-2007 eleven new countries entered (now called) European Union and North Atlantic treaty organization (NATO), which meant a complete break from the Russian orientation (Bufon, 2007). Although most of the Europe is now well integrated into the intereuropean organizations, the eastern and southeastern side of the continent still remains exempt from this process and functions as shatter belt where major geopolitical actors of the region try to establish their influences.

Beyond the borders of European Union lies a territory that is somehow trapped between the EU in the west and Russia in the east. It includes the east Slavic nations of Belarus and Ukraine together with romance Moldova. All these countries were once part of the Soviet Union together with Baltic countries (which successfully stepped on the path of European integration) and countries of Transcaucasia and Central Asia. Although Soviet Union is long gone, her main successor – Russia – considers these territories as her “courtyard” and wants to strengthen her geostrategic positions in the region. This is quite evident by examining the history of Russian interventions which cumulated to another full scale war on the European continent. Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 is by far the largest epoch in the series of events that started in the years of the dissolution of the USSR and lead to numerous conflicts, military interventions, peacekeeping missions and formations of separatist states.

Crucial events of enforcements of Russian geopolitical influences in the region are listed below:

- Formation of Transnistria (1990) and Gagauzia on Moldavian territory
- Formation of Abkhazia, Adjara and South Ossetia on Georgian territory
- Tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh
- First Chechen war 1994-1996 and second Chechen war in 1999
- Other conflicts in northern Caucasus and Central Asia
- Annexation of Crimea and formation of separatist republics in the western Ukraine



**Map 1:** Areas of Russian influences nad control in eastern Europe and Caucasus. Source: Tafuro Ambrosetti, 2019.

The reasons behind Russian geopolitical stance in Eastern Europe are complex and result in the inheritance of Soviet Union and Tsarist Russian Empire. The Heartland of Eurasia has always been a sparse area that has seen the emergence of many statehoods, which developed into global powers. Since the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century, the heartland was in control of Russian states that developed from the Duchy of

Muscovy. The key to maintaining and defending this vast Eurasian landscape was in controlling the main geostrategic points such as mountainous areas of Carpathians, Caucasus and Asian highlands, together with the main lowlands that acted as access point to the heartland (Mackinder, 1906). The European part of Russia and neighboring countries is mostly flat and easy to traverse. German-Polish plains to the west and Moldavian plain to the south connect Russian areas of influence to the central Europe and the Balkans. Throughout the history they have often seen large armies marching to the east (Napoleonic wars, WWI and WWII) and west (Mongol invasion, WWI, WWII) (Meinig, 1956). Importance of this land somehow explains why Russia is so eager to retain her influence in the area and keep her ex satellites (from cold war era) to join European integration and western military alliances. Baltic States, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria along with parts of ex-Yugoslavia are now firmly in the western sphere of geopolitical organizations. The remaining countries – Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova on the other hand represent a “cordon sanitaire” between Russia and EU (Zupančič, 2021). Russia views every attempt of future shifts to the western alliances as direct attack on her geopolitical interests and national security.

The main goal of this essay is to interpret Russian geopolitics on the example of Transnistria in the light of recent Russian invasion on Ukraine. Although that Russian military operations have experienced quite some setbacks in the occurring war and the future of the conflict has yet to reveal itself, it is wise to consider the effects of the war on neighboring regions especially those which already act as potential “pawns” in the Russian ambitions to establish herself as main political power in eastern and south-eastern Europe and to fortify her geostrategic position in this region. Transnistria might not be the most common subject in international relations and media, but in the future it may become important conflict zone that will prove to be the cause of escalation of conflicts in Europe. In some way it resembles the situation in (prewar) pro-Russian republics of Luhansk and Donetsk in western Ukraine, with one major difference. Pro-Russian republics of Ukraine directly border Russian territories, while Transnistria is separated from

Russia with Ukrainian territories. If Russia accomplishes her goals in Ukrainian war and takes control of the Black sea coast, the geostratigical position of Transnistria will change drastically (Marhsall, 2016). It may yet have a role to play in the Ukrainian conflict and also a potential of becoming next target in Russian aggression. Nevertheless, Moldavia was a part of the USSR is not a member of EU or NATO and is one of the countries that Russia considers as her zone of influence.

The essay includes a short historical and geographical background of the formation of Transnistrian republic and past conflicts that have arose in the region. It also illustrates the international position of Transnistria and her status as pro-Russian separatist state with present active military personnel. Furthermore, we will evaluate Transnistrian geostratigical importance and her relations to Moldova, Romania, Ukraine and Russia. Throughout the assessment, we will observe the subject through the eyes of Russian geopolitics. Only that way we will be able to put Transnistria in the context of recent Russian invasion of Ukraine and analyze its influences on the region and potentials for future conflicts. Conclusions will help us determine the future relations between east-European political players and the role of this area in the years to follow.

## **GEO-HISTORICAL OUTLINE OF TRANSNISTRIA**

Transnistria or Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic is an internationally unrecognized state, which is – in international relations – considered as “de jure” part of Moldova, although it “de facto” functions as independent country. The formations of contemporary Transnistrian state dates to the start of 90s when USSR experienced a great wave of demonstrations and national aspirations of her republics, which led to the democratization, fall of socialism and emergence of new national states. Transnistria could be considered as one of the territories, which wept at the dissolution of USSR and wanted to remain under Russian political protection. At least according to high concentration of Russian population that sparked a rebellion and formed a separatist state. Nevertheless,



Transnistrian flag is the only national flag that still depicts a hammer and a sickle – symbols of communism.

Along with Gagauzia, Transnistria is considered as one of two autonomous regions in Moldova. The states territory is quite peculiarly stretched in a thin stripe between Ukrainian border on the east and the river Dniester on the west, with small parts reaching over the river on the Moldavian side. Territory is landlocked (as well as whole Moldova) with a thin strip of Ukrainian land separating it from the Black sea. Its capital and largest city is Tiraspol located in southern part of the country (Zupančič, 2021). With the area of around 4.163 km<sup>2</sup> it is one of the smallest European states (Bufon, 2012). The population estimates quite differ from around 350.000 to 500.000 people. Population is ethnically quite heterogeneous, with around 29% Russians, 29% Moldavians, 23% Ukrainians and some other ethnic groups. Most of people of Transnistria have Moldavian passport but Russian, Ukrainian and Romanian passports are very common as well. The country has its own political structure and currency (Transnistrian ruble). Administratively the country is divided in five districts and two cities (Tiraspol and Bender) (Wikipedia, 2022).



**Map 2:** Transnistria in relation to the Moldova. Source: Pena-Ramos, 2018.



**Picture 1:** Transnistrian flag. Source: Wikipedia, 2022.



**Picture 2:** Transnistrian coat of arms. Source: Wikipedia, 2022.



To evaluate the geopolitical situation of Transnistria we must first understand how this separatist republic came to being. Formation of the state is very much connected to Russian strategic interests in the past. Many nations have used the policy of forced ethnical deportations and resettlement of those territories with titular nation, but Russia (in the tsarist and communist era) has brought this practice to another level. Many areas of strategic importance have been purposefully ethnically transformed to enforce Russian ethnical majority. Russian predecessors have used this tactic to form exclaves of Russian ethnicity throughout the parts of ex imperial and socialist Russia. Some ethnic groups (for example Tatars from Crimea, Ukrainians from vast regions of modern day Ukraine, Poles from areas of ex-polish territories etc.) were moved deep in harsh Russian interior or other republics, meanwhile Russian population was settled on those areas. Russian minorities today live in most of ex-USSR republics and act as a political leverage to enforce Russian interests under pretext of ensuring safety of the people. This also applies for large Russian minority in Moldova, which is mostly concentrated in Transnistria (Marshall, 2016).

In historical context area of modern day Moldova is closely connected to the region of Moldova in modern day Romania. Parts of modern Moldova were once called Bessarabia therefore the term will be used for the region between rivers Dniester and Prut, while Moldova will be used for the territory between Prut and the Carpathians. Until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century both regions belonged to the Ottoman Empire. In 1812 Russia took control of Bessarabia while Moldova (together with Wallachia) in time came to form the country of Romania. Despite some territorial shifts during the 19. century, territory of modern Moldova (Bessarabia) remained under Russian control until the end of World War I. Dniester river had long been established as a dividing frontier (not line) that separated Slavic population in the east from Romanians in the west. But during the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia started to populate areas east of Dniester with (mainly) Russians and Ukrainians. Territory of Transnistria was not part of Bessarabian governorate at that time. Eberhardt

estimates that it was populated (in 1897) with approximately 180.000 Moldavians, 90.000 Ukrainians, 30.000 Jews and some other minorities (Eberhardt, 2003).

World War I brought major changes that saw the collapse of the three empires (Russian, German and Austrian) and creation of many new independent countries. The emergence of "Great Romania", which was enlarged with Transylvania, Banat, Bukovina and Besarabia (at that time also including Black sea coast that is today (as for now) part of Ukraine), put forward a large state with substantial national minorities. Most of modern day Moldova became part of Romania but the areas across the Dniester remained under the (newly formed) USSR. Soviet regime never acknowledged Romanian control of Bessarabia. In order to press the matter and radicalize national conflicts in Bessarabia, USSR decided to form an autonomous Moldavian region on the territory of Ukrainian SSR. In the 1924 Moldavian autonomous Soviet socialist republic was proclaimed on the land of Transnistria together with parts of modern day Ukraine. The ethnical composition of the autonomous republic at that time does not correspond to the contemporary territory of Transnistria but Soviet census from 1930 cites that the republic was inhabited by 277.500 (48.5%) Ukrainians, 172.600 (30.1%) Moldavians and around 48.000 (8.5%) both Poles and Russians. We can conclude that in absolute terms Moldavian population had shrunk for around 8.000 people in 27 years between 1897 and 1924 (Eberhardt, 2003).

The outburst of World War II in 1939 pulled Europe in another six years of terror and destruction. According to the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, signed by ministers of Nazi Germany and Soviet Union, USSR was free to take Bessarabia from Romania. That happened in the year 1940 when the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic was formed from parts of Bessarabia (without the Black sea coast which was ceded to Ukrainian SSR) and Transnistrian part of Moldavian ASSR which was dissolved. Territory of Moldavian SSR roughly corresponds to the contemporary territory of Moldova. After the break of German-Soviet cooperation in 1941, Romania (on the side of Germany) reoccupied Bessarabia and put forward massive deportations of Ukrainians and Jews. But the collapse of

German military power and march of Red Army towards the west reestablished Soviet control over modern day Moldova which remained under USSR until 1990. After WW II USSR continued to settle Moldavian SSR with Russian, Ukrainian and Belorussian population, in theory to compensate for the inter war losses, but geopolitical motives are hard to conceal. Slavic newcomers have mostly been settled east of the Dniester River on the lands that were to become Transnistria (Bufon, 2012). This area experienced strong russification, which led to the emergence of secession state after dissolution of Soviet Union.

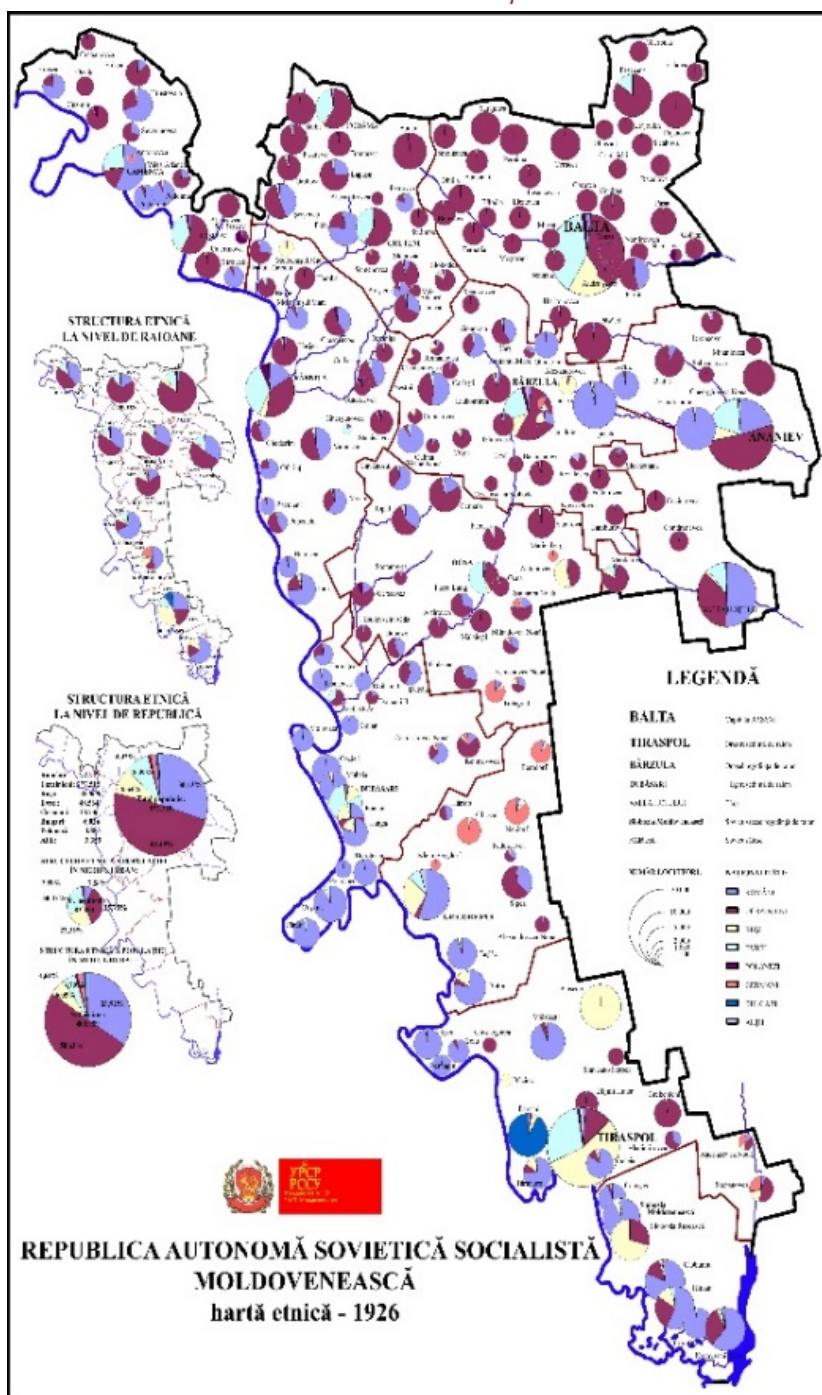
The tables bellow present the ethnical structure of Moldavian SSR in the socialist era according to the data that Eberhardt collected from Soviet population censuses. The figures apply to the whole territory of Moldova. Due to my lack of knowledge of Cyrillic alphabet and eastern Slavic languages I am unfortunately unable to analyze the data which would apply solely to the territory of Transnistria.

**Table 1:** Ethnic structure of Moldova in the socialist era

Ethnic group	1959		1970		1979		1989	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Moldavians	1.887.000	65,4	2.303.900	64,5	2.525.700	64,0	2.794.700	64,5
Ukrainians	421.000	14,6	506.600	14,2	560.700	14,2	600.400	13,8
Russians	293.000	10,2	414.000	11,6	505.700	12,8	562.100	13,0
Gagauzes	96.000	3,3	124.900	3,5	138.000	3,5	153.400	3,5
Bulgarians	62.000	2,1	73.800	2,1	80.600	2,0	88.400	2,0
Jews	96.000	3,3	98.100	2,7	80.100	2,0	65.700	1,5
Belarusians	6.000	0,2	10.300	0,3	13.900	0,4	19.600	0,5
Germans	3.800	0,1	9.400	0,3	11.400	0,3	7.300	0,2
Poles	4.800	0,2	4.900	0,2	5.000	0,1	4.700	0,1
Others	8.100	0,3	22.600	0,6	28.700	0,7	27.500	0,6
Total	2.884.000	100	3.568.900	100	3.949.800	100	4.335.400	100

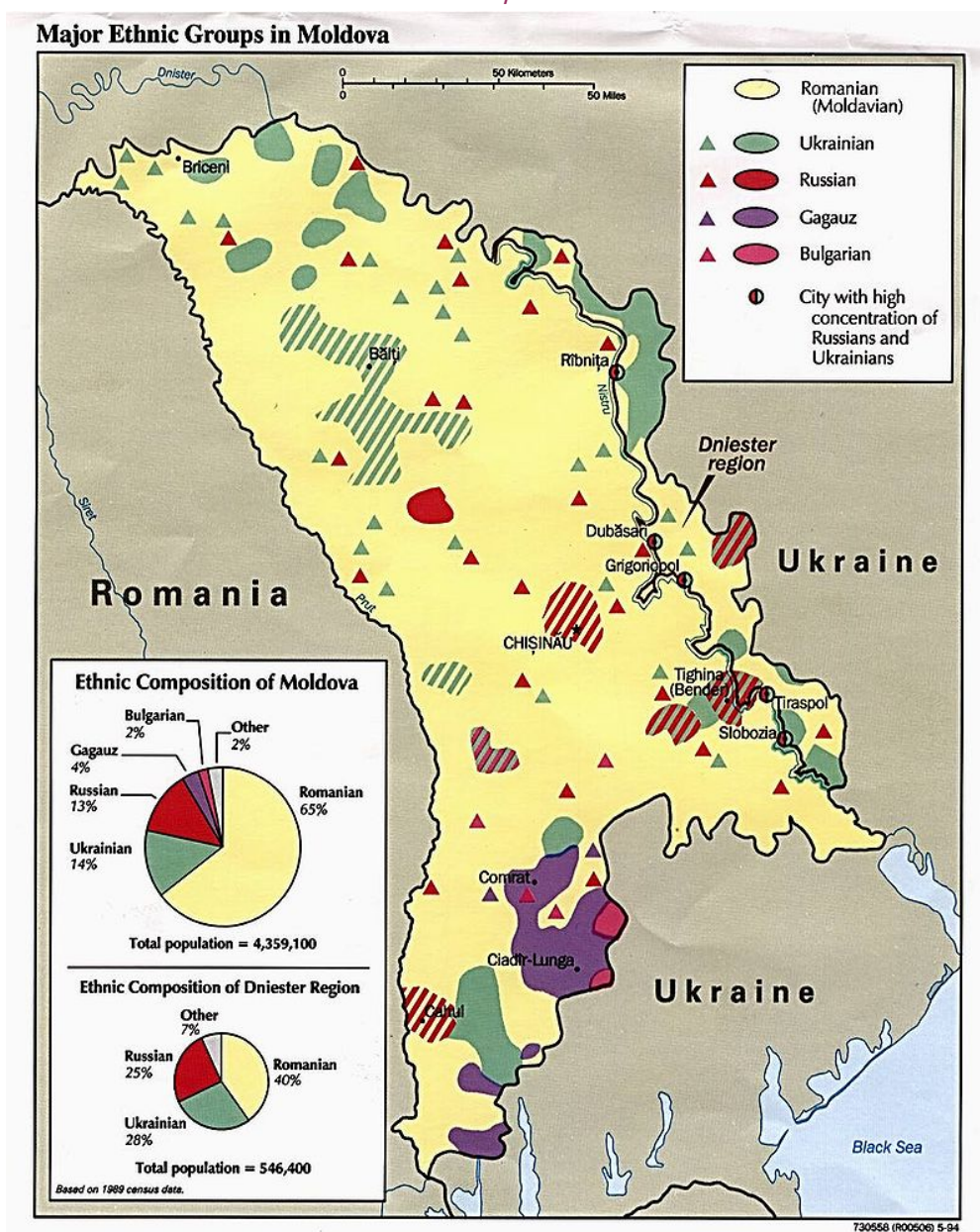
Source: Eberhardt, 2003

If we put in account that in the year 1930 Russian population on the territory of contemporary Moldova was at 9,5% and Ukrainian at 8,5% we see that both Slavic groups grew in both absolute and relative terms. Areas east of the Dniester River were the ones that saw the biggest immigration of Russian and Ukrainian population. It is also important to mention that the population on the territory of modern Moldova almost doubled between 1930 and 1989.



**Map 3:** Ethnic structure of Moldavian ASSR in 1926. Source: Wikipedia, 2022.





**Map 4** (right): Ethnic structure of Moldavian SSR in 1989. Source: Wikipedia, 2022.

During the 80s USSR experienced a wave of socio-political reforms that led to internal breakdown of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe. This process is connected with Gorbachevs policies of perestroika and glasnost which brought political liberalization. One of its side effects was growth of

nationalist ideas throughout most of the soviet republics (Zupančič, 2013). The example of Moldova shows how decades of autocratic subordination of republics under state regime burst out at first signs of liberalization. The rise of pro-Romanian nationalism in Moldova brought major changes in cultural sphere of Moldovan society. Moldovan language became the only state language and Latin alphabet was reinstalled. Later, after declaration of independence, Romanian flag and coat of arms were accepted as well. Despite cultural shift towards Romanian influences, majority of Moldovans opted against full integration with Romania and expressed desire for an independent, sovereign state (Eberhardt, 2003). Changes in social and cultural orientation gave rise to national tensions between Moldovan majority and Slavic minorities concentrated along the Dniester River. Therefore, conditions for formation of separatist Transnistrian republic were laid.

On 23. of June 1990, independent and sovereign parliamentary republic of Moldova was proclaimed. Meanwhile referendum for the independence of Transnistria was, on 2. of September, followed by proclamation of Pridnestrovian Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. In the southern part of Moldova Gagauzian population was preparing to cast its own autonomy referendum and populist front of Moldova reacted with formation of volunteer armed militias to stop it. Moldovan actions were soon followed by formation of pro-Russian volunteer militias in Transnistria. Tensions in Moldova were escalating and few outburst of violence occurred in the following months. When it began clear in the 1991 that USSR would not be able to survive, Pridnestrovian Moldavian SSR declared independence from the Soviet Union and abandoned its socialist ideology. The self-proclaimed country was renamed Pridnestrovian Moldavian republic. The following year saw an outburst of war between Moldova and Transnistria, which was sparked by the proclamation of Moldovan Defense Ministry to take control of (ex-soviet) 14<sup>th</sup> Guards Army that was mostly composed of personnel from Transnistrian territory. Fighting continued throughout the early 1992 when the 14<sup>th</sup> Guards Army entered the conflict on Transnistrian side. A ceasefire agreement was signed on 21. July 1992 and thus, one of many frozen conflicts on eastern European territory was created.

Since the 1992 Transnistrian war Moldova has no effective control over the territory of Transnistria, although it still considers it as “de jure” part of the country, together with international political community (Mackenzie, 2022). Russia acts as a peacekeeper between Moldova and Transnistria and as such enforces her influence in the area. Around 2000 Russian military personnel have remained in Transnistria to the present day in order to sustain the fragile peace.

At this point we will also present the demographic data of Transnistrian territory from 1989 onwards. Process of ethnical changes will help us understand the role of Transnistria in Russian relations to Moldova as well as Ukraine. As mentioned above – concentrations of Russian population in the adjacent countries are in the eyes of Russian geopolitics considered as potential factors of enforcement of Russian influences in the area.

**Table 2:** Ethnic structure of Transnistria after 1989

	1989		2004		2015	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Moldavians	240.000	39,9	177.150	31,9	135.950	28,6
Russians	153.300	25,5	168.270	30,3	138.330	29,1
Ukrainians	170.000	28,3	159.930	28,8	108.860	22,9
Others	38.500	6,4	49.980	9	26.620	5,6
Not specified	/	/	/	/	65.600	13,8
Total	601.660	100	555.347	100	475.373	100

Source (1989): Eberhardt, 2003.

Source (2004): государственная служба статистики министерства экономики пмр, 2006.

Source (2015): newspmr.com, 2017.

As the table shows, total population of Transnistria decreased by around 125.000 people between 1989–2015. The decrease applies to all three main ethnic groups but we have to consider the 65.600 people who hasn't declared their ethnicity in 2015 census. In both absolute and relative terms Moldavian population experienced the largest decrease. Ukrainian population also decreased from around 28% in 1989 to 23% in 2015. Russian population on the other hand increased its size in relative terms from 25,5% in 1989 to 29% in 2015. Presented data shows that Russian factor strengthened its position and, in 2015, accounted for the largest ethnic group in Transnistria. Less than a third of population considers



themselves as ethnically Moldovan, with more than 60% declaring east Slavic ethnicity (Russians and Ukrainians).

## **POLITICAL STATUS OF TRANSNISTRIA**

Pridniestrovian Moldavian republic remains one of many internationally unrecognized countries of the world. Her political and international status hasn't changed much since the war of 1992. While Transnistrian government has effective control on its proclaimed territory, only three other political entities recognize Transnistria as independent country. Namely, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Arstakh, which are all located in the south Caucasus region and are also considered as internationally unrecognized or partly recognized countries. The first two are, by international law, considered as parts of Georgia but act as independent republics under Russian protection. Arstakh on the other hand is considered as part of Azerbaijan but is controlled by pro-Armenian forces. The 2020 Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh showed how frozen conflicts may spark into a full scale war (Marshall, 2021). All four separatist states mutually recognize their sovereignty; South Ossetia and Abkhazia are also recognized by five UN members, with Russia being their strategic guardian (Gaiser, 2010). Both regions share a similar geopolitical position with Transnistria. They were formed after Russian war with Georgia in 2008. Russian forces secured position in both republics and gave Russia a chance to form military bases in the South Caucasus region (Zupančič, 2021). The Georgian situation demonstrates how Russian geopolitical ambitions function and reminds us that similar conflicts may spark in other Russian backed areas such as Transnistria.

Transnistria is a presidential republic with great executive power of a president (who is elected every five years). The Supreme Council acts as legislative body and is composed of 43 members, also elected every five years. Elections in Transnistria are often considered unfair with many electoral incidents happening in the past. Most of the international political bodies do not consider Transnistrian elections as legit, due to the fact that the country is not internationally

recognized (Gaiser, 2010). This also raises a question about Moldovan elections. Transnistria is considered as part of Moldovan territory and despite no efficient control of Moldovan government in the region, many Moldovan citizens live on the territory of Transnistria. In 2021 Moldovan parliamentary elections, there were attempts to open polling stations on some areas under Transnistrian control, in order to secure electoral right of Moldovan citizens. In the end decision was made to keep all polling stations on the west side of Dniester River in order to secure fair elections (Duffy, 2021).

Since 1992 there were some attempts to resolve or at least normalize relations between Moldova and Transnistria. In the year 1997 a “Memorandum on the principles of normalization of the relations between the Republic of Moldova and Transnistria” was signed by Moldovan and Transnistrian presidents but its effects were limited. At the beginning of new millennium (2003), a proposition was made by Russian diplomats to form an asymmetric federation with Transnistria being a minority part. Transnistrian delegation signed the document but the Moldovan side refused to, due to Transnistrian demand that for the next twenty years Russian forces would act as a guarantee for the intended federation. The year 2006 brought a referendum in favour of independence from Moldova and free association with Russia, which was supported by 97% of population of Transnistria (Gaiser, 2010). International community refused to recognize the results of referendum. All future negotiations brought no further advance in normalization of affairs between both political entities.

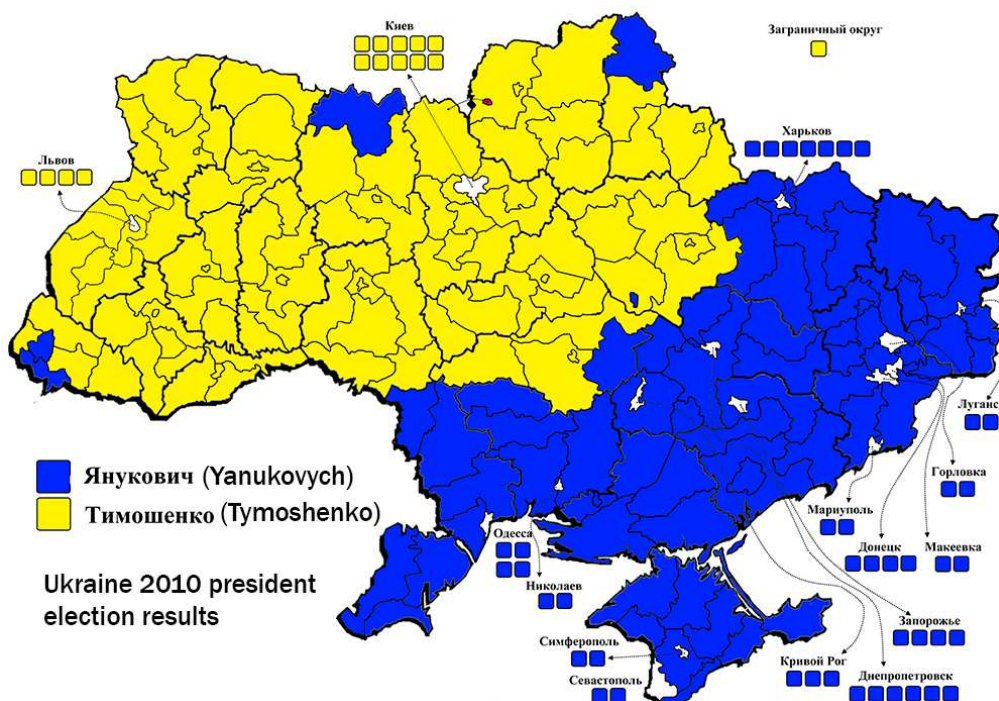
## **ESCALATION OF RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN CONFLICT**

Ukrainian territory has long been included in Russian political structure. The Ukrainian and Belarusian borderlands were seen as a main battleground between the regional powers of Central and Eastern Europe throughout the history. After the demise of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth at the end of 18. Century, Russia took control of most of the modern day Ukraine except for the region of Galicia which was under Austrian control (Davies, 2013). The break of Empires at the

end of WWI created vacuum in the eastern part of Europe, which was soon filled with the emergence of new national states. Ukrainians also fought for creation of independent country but were eventually defeated by Polish armies from the west and Bolsheviks from the east. Eastern part of the country became Ukrainian SSR of USSR, while the western part was ceded to Poland after the end of Polish-Soviet war in 1922 (Davies, 2015). During WWII Ukrainian territories were transformed into battlegrounds after German invasion on USSR in 1941. The advance of Red Army in the second part of the war reclaimed Ukrainian lands together with much of Central and Eastern Europe (Keegan, 2005). Reconfiguration of Polish borders after the war gave eastern borderlands to Ukrainian, Belarusian and Lithuanian SSRs thus territory of Ukraine was mostly defined (Davies, 2013). Khrushchev's decision to transfer territory of Crimea from Russian SSR to Ukrainian SSR proved to be source of great Russian-Ukrainian tensions after the fall of Soviet Union. Crimean peninsula was in the past mainly settled by Crimean Tatars and Russians. Transfers of Tatar population to Russian interior was yet another example of Russian ethno-political aspirations (Naimark, 2001). Ukrainian territory was an important part of USSR. Ukrainian SSR was third largest and second most populous republic of Soviet Union. The fall of superpower at the start of 90s dissolved the state into 15 independent nations thus Ukraine finally achieved her independence.

Russia, as the main figure of USSR, took on her predecessor inheritance together with the role of a major global political power. While most of USRRs ex satellites and even some countries that were part of USSR (Baltic States) stepped on the road of European integration, Ukraine (together with Belarus and Moldova) remained under Russian influences. Geostrategical position of Ukraine along with her vast resources is without doubt of great significance. Russia tried to block every attempt of closer cooperation between Ukraine and the EU and NATO. One of the main subjects of Russian influence in Ukraine is large Russian community that lives in the country, mainly in the eastern parts. Results of Ukrainian elections quite well demonstrate the polarization of Ukrainian

population that is more or less divided on the pro-EU west and pro-Russian east.



**Map 5:** Results of 2010 Ukrainian presidential elections. Source: Morales, 2014.

Due to the great complexity of Ukrainian demographics and political preferences, it is hard to determine Ukrainian-Russian relations. Tensions have always been high and while Ukraine was slowly moving towards the western orientation, Russia tried to stop that with any means possible (Amborsseti, 2019). Orange revolution of 2004 saw great demonstrations and protests against the results of presidential elections. The election of pro-western president Yushchenko marked a great victory for supporters of closer cooperation with the west. In the last decade tensions between countries escalated in armed conflicts, which started in 2014 with Russian advance on Crimean peninsula. Since the fall of USSR Russia kept control over some military and naval facilities in Crimea, the largest one being in Sevastopol. Pro-Russian unrest on Crimea in 2014 gave Russia and excuse to occupy the peninsula under the prefix of securing Russian population. Military operation soon

led to annexations of Crimea, which is, since then, under efficient Russian control (Zupančič, 2021).

Simultaneously another armed conflict was sparked in the eastern part of Ukraine where fighting erupt between Ukrainian armies and pro-Russian separatist in self-declared republics of Donetsk and Luhansk. Though Russia officially denied involvement of her armies in the conflict, it is clear that her support of separatist was crucial in securing the area under control of self-declared republics. Since the 2015 ceasefire, fighting has never truly stopped and relations between Ukrainians and Russians strongly deteriorated. Throughout the 2010s Russia strengthened her military positions along the Ukrainian border especially in the last two years. In the months preceding Russian invasion on Ukraine, Russia has accused Ukrainian government of rusophobia and repression of Russian population in Ukraine. Yet again we see the pattern of Russian supposed protection of her minorities in neighboring countries as an excuse for a military operation.

## **RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE**

The 2022 invasion was sparked by false flag operation, which proved to be just one of many in the ongoing war. Russia accused Ukraine of bombing one of its border facility while Ukraine denied her involvement. On the same day (21. February) Russia recognized the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk and ordered her troops to enter their territory. Three days later, a full-scale invasion was launched on the Ukrainian territory across the Russian-Ukrainian border as well as from the territory of Belarus and from Crimea. Europe once again experienced war on its continent though Russian authorities still refer to the invasion as “special military operation” not war. Russian forces reached furthest in the south and east portion of Ukraine while the north arm of invasion (which also reached the capital of Kiev) was eventually pushed back by Ukrainian armies. Land invasion was supported with air raids, which targeted most of the main Ukrainian cities. One of the main goals of Russian invasion is the control of Black sea coast, which has long been a subject of



Russian geopolitical appetites. Ukraine already lost access to the Sea of Azov along with a portion of Black sea coast. We can expect further Russian advance along the coast towards the port of Odessa, which is quite close to the Transnistria – the main interest of our essay.

It is important to note that along the physical war, large war of media, diplomacy and opinions is being fought in the background. Wars in the 21th century are often strongly influenced by the factors of international stance towards the conflict and medias influences on the people's opinions. Following the invasion, harsh sanctions were declared towards Russia by the western countries and most of the international community condemns Russian actions and agitates towards peace. Situation in Russia itself is quite complex as most of the media is controlled by the state an functions as propaganda to justify the invasion. Many Russians protest against the invasion but police forces uses all means necessary to silence the opposition. Ukrainian government (with support of the west) reports of many hostilities and violation of Genoa Convention by Russian forces which Russia strongly denies and considers it a western or Ukrainian propaganda. One of the most controversial chapters of the war is alleged mass murder of Ukrainian population in the town of Bucha, which at this point still remains to be investigated. As mentioned above, many false flag operations were launched to accuse the other side (mostly Ukrainian) of war crimes or provocations. One of the recent ones happened on 25<sup>th</sup> of April on the territory of Transnistria. The fact that this essay began to form weeks before that incident proves that its main subject is worth to put in consideration and that Transnistria may yet have a role to play in the ongoing conflict.

Due to the reasons mentioned above we will not further analyze the conflict as it is hard to form an objective conclusion at this point. There are many ongoing information and misinformation that are yet to be interpreted after the war comes to the end and a complete research is made. Instead we will focus on the potential role of Transnistria in the Russian-Ukrainian war as well as potential conflict zone after the war comes to the end. The results of the war will, in any way, change geopolitical situation in the region and Transnistria

may be an important factor in future of the eastern-European relations.



Source: UK MoD / Institute for the Study of War (21:00 GMT, 26 April) 2022

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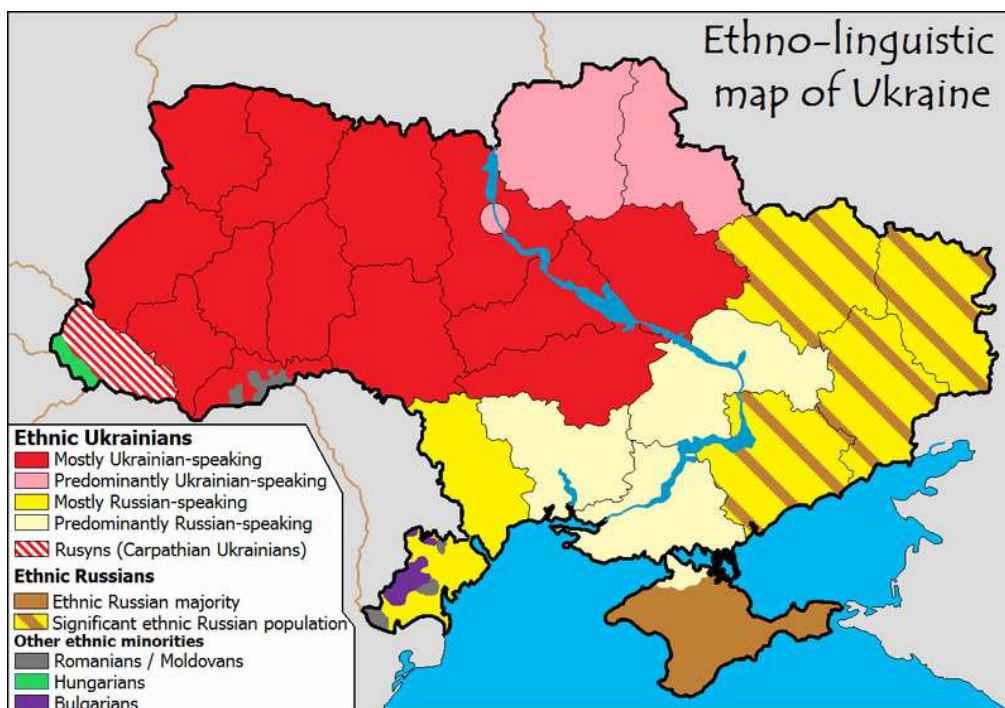
**Map 6:** Military situation of ongoing war on 26<sup>th</sup> of April 2022. Source: Peter, 2022.

## ROLE OF TRANSNISTRIA IN RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN CONFLICT

Now that we have examined the nature of Russo-Ukrainian relations and the status of Transnistria, we can put both subjects together and see how they are connected. As we have seen on the map above, Russian forces are advancing along the Black sea coast towards the port of Odesa, close to the Transnistrian territory. One of the main Russian goals in this invasion might be to cut Ukrainian territory from the access to the sea and create a landlocked Ukraine, which would of course strongly weaken Ukrainian positions and give Russia control over large portions of – strategically important –



Black sea coast. Nevertheless, one of Russia's historical goals was to secure the access to the warm sea. The map above shows ethno-linguistic distribution on the Ukrainian territory. It is evident that territories east of Transnistria are ethnically mixed with large concentrations of Russian population or Ukrainians that speak Russian.



**Map 7:** Ethno-linguistic map of Ukraine. Source: Morales, 2014.

Russian geostratigical ambitions most likely include the whole territory of Ukraine but at this point it is hard to believe that Russia would be able to annex (or establish control) over the whole country. Efforts will probably be put into securing positions on the areas with large numbers of Russian population in the western and southern part of the country. If Russia achieves this goal the new political borders between Russia and Moldova may be formed. That way Transnistria, which is already mainly supplied by Russia, would get direct access to the Russian territory and political position of pro-Russian separatist in the state would largely increase. Of course at this point this are only speculations. We will discuss

few of many potential political scenarios in Transnistria but first let us examine Russian military presence in the country.

As mentioned in the chapter 2. Russian military personnel is active on the territory of Transnistria since the war of 1992. Many propositions have been made and treaties signed to prepare the removal of Russia's troops from the area. Large convoys of military equipment have left to Russia throughout the years and Russian military personnel was limited to around 1500 soldiers. Russia insist that remaining forces serve as peacekeepers to maintain the 1992 ceasefire (Gaiser, 2010). Moldova on the other hand considers Russian involvement as a foreign military occupation illegally deployed on the territory of the state (Gribincea, 2006). In 2008 NATO made a resolution in which Russia was urged to remove its military presence from the territory of Moldova. The Russian state controlled media and opinion control that was described above is also active on the territory of Transnistria. Authorities claim the "monopoly on truth" and punish every action of criticism against Russian involvement in the country (Deschide, 2018).

In the month before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Ukrainian intelligence stated that it has evidence of planned false flag operation on the territory of Transnistria, which is meant to justify the invasion. Russia denied those claims, as well as in similar situation in Donbas month later. The April of 2022 saw an increased Russian activity in Transnistria. Ukrainian Deputy Defense minister stated that Russia is increasing its military presence at the Transnistrian-Ukrainian border. And finally we arrive to the incidents that started on 25<sup>th</sup> of April and may lead to the spread of military activity on the territory of Moldova. Until now, the official stance of Transnistrian authorities is to maintain its neutrality in the ongoing conflict but that may change in the months to come. At this point it is uncertain who is responsible for the attacks on the Ministry of State Security and radio antennas near Tiraspol. Russia claims that attack was made by Ukrainian terrorist activity while Ukraine and Moldova consider it an act of Russian provocation and destabilization of situation in Transnistria (Francis, Ilyushina, 2022).

Russian motives to spread the war to Transnistria may be connected with the plan to completely occupy the Ukrainian Black sea coast, where the large port of Odessa presents a major obstacle. Occupation of the city would probably prove to be very difficult but having a strategic ground just 100 km from the city (on the area that is internationally considered as part of Moldova) could be crucial for supplies and to form a ring around the port (Marshall, 2016). If Russia succeeds in the occupation of southern Ukraine, Transnistria may as well become part of its territory, which is one of the goals of pro-Russian separatist since the formation of the country in 1990. That would, of course, provoke the reaction of international community and may lead to escalation of conflicts on the European continent (Peter, 2022).

If Transnistria is brought into the conflict the Moldovan authorities would most likely call for aid to defend a part of its territory. Moldova remains one of European countries that is not a member of EU or NATO but it has close ties with Romania due to strong cultural, economic and, in some way, political relations (Bufon, 2011). Romania may act as a defender of Moldovan sovereignty and support her “cultural sister” in the clash with Russia. As a member of both EU and NATO, Romania has stronger geopolitical positions than Moldova, and her involvement in the conflict may lead to what would seem to become World War III. Again it is important to note that “futuristics” is not the goal of this essay but it is worth to put in consideration that escalation of the conflicts may lead to the “domino effect” which would again reconfigure the geopolitical positions of Eastern Europe, the whole continent and the world as such.

Quite opposite scenario could reveal itself in the event of deterioration of Russian positions in the Ukrainian conflict. Russian invasion is experiencing quite some setbacks and strength of Russian armies seems weaker than it was initially considered. If Ukrainian forces manage to stop the Russian advance, reclaim some of the lost lands and exhaust Russian military reserves, Moldova could take the opportunity and reclaim Transnistria to itself. This would mean that after 30 years Moldova would yet again establish its control over the separatist area and could reintegrate it in its administrative

system. Liberation from Russian geopolitical grasp could also open the way of Moldovan integration into European international organization and even lead to her acceptance into NATO, which would act as a guardian of future Russian retaliations.

## **CONCLUSION**

The ongoing Russo-Ukrainian conflict represents one of the major geopolitical episodes of this century. At this point, it is hard to predict its epilogue and the consequences it will have on global distribution of political power. The world has shown great support towards Ukraine and Russia is quite isolated in her struggles to establish her future geopolitical positions in Eastern Europe. All previous attempts were made on lower scale and with weaker international response. Past Russian interventions in Georgia and Ukraine were only an overture in Russian geostrategic ambitions. In the decades following the fall of USSR, Russia was enforcing her power to establish control over the countries of ex-USSR and form Russian satellites in Europe and Transcaucasia. Transnistria is one of such satellites, which acted as a source of destabilization in the region and as a blockade in potential Moldovan euro-integration.

After thirty years of slumber, the frozen conflict of Transnistria seems to be put forward in international relations once again. It gives Russia an important strategic ground in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict which is slowly getting closer to the territory of our interest. Transnistria was one of the points of Russian control which was farthest away from the integral Russian territory. With the advancement towards Crimea in 2014 and along the Black sea coast in 2022, its importance grew significantly. Until now, western alliances did not consider Transnistria as one of the major threats to European stability but things may change if the Ukrainian war spreads towards the territory of Moldova. As for now (30.4.2022) Moldova, together with EU and NATO, is not giving official statements about potential escalation of conflicts in Transnistria but without doubts this Russian satellite is

attracting the eyes of main political actors and is being carefully observed in order to stop the outburst of war on the Moldovan territory.

The bombings on the territory of Transnistria (24<sup>th</sup> of April), for which until now no one has claimed responsibility, show the vulnerability of frozen conflicts and how they can escalate into armed conflicts in no time. Russia has many reasons to spread the Ukrainian conflict on the territory of Moldova. Transnistria could act as a strategic ground from where Russia could secure her positions in southern Ukraine, encircle the port of Odessa and cut of the supply lines to the city. Moldovan national security very much relies on the outcome of the war and the country could become (in event of Russian victory) the next target in Russian geopolitical expansion. In this essay we have debated three different possibilities of the potential Transnistrian role in this conflict.

1. Ukrainian conflict could spread in Transnistria and further destabilize the region

2. After Ukrainian conflict Transnistria may become the next target of Russian aggression

3. After Ukrainian conflict Moldova could use the opportunity to reintegrate Transnistria

Scenarios very much relay on the results of Russo-Ukrainian war. In any way, Transnistria may have an important role in future European geopolitics and is worth putting in consideration at evaluating the geostrategical positions in Eastern Europe.

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## DEFENCE FORCES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION: PROSPECTS AND AMBITIONS

### *Abstract:*

The outbreak of war in Ukraine in February 2022 caused significant changes as far as international order is concerned. Sudden realization of security threat made the European Union's leaders acknowledge the importance of efficient defence strategy and military independency. In order to assess the possible effects of newly implemented European defence initiatives, it is necessary to examine the issues regarding current condition of the E.U. security. The aim of this paper is to analyse European military potential, European military issues, as well as selected defence programs being a result of the dynamic changes in the security system.

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### *Key words:*

European Union, EDIRPA, Military forces, Versailles Declaration

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### **INTRODUCTION**

*Confronted with growing instability, strategic competition and security threats, we decided to take more responsibility for our security and take further decisive steps towards building our European sovereignty, reducing our dependencies and designing a new growth and investment model (...) <sup>1</sup>*

– The Versailles Declaration, March 2022

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<sup>1</sup> Council of the European Union, *The Versailles Declaration*, March 2022, p. 3.

The whole world has recently experienced the end of the end of history, yet it is Europe which is the most impacted by the outbreak of war in Ukraine, in social, economic, and political aspects. The Europeans got used to simple peacekeeping within the union. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has forced a confrontation between the leaders of the European Union and uncomfortable reality – now it seems clear that the European security had been, in fact, neglected for the last few decades. The E.U. policy focused mostly on democracy and prosperity, while the issues regarding security did not appear to be a concern of the European leaders, as military cover was provided by the United States, through its North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. The armed conflict, which happens to take place right behind the European's Union eastern border, however, appears to bring impact on the leaders' attitude and significantly increase desire to conceptualize new defence strategy after decades of security decline. Not only have the Europeans provided weapons and humanitarian aid to Ukraine, but also announced, in several cases, noteworthy expansion of national defence budgets. Nevertheless, it remains unclear whether these actions will extend to larger reforms of the European Union's almost infamously uncoordinated military structures<sup>2</sup>. Formation of a new defence initiative, such as an E.U. army, would stand a demanding and risky challenge for the whole union, yet it would also create the possibility for Europe's independent and more secure future.

## **THE POTENTIAL, THE HETEROGENITY**

There is no doubt about the E.U. military potential – the level of Europe's defence spending and the size of its collective forces in uniform should make it a global military power. The twenty-seven member states of the union have over 1,3 million active-duty military personnel, which makes its capacity comparable to the armed forces of the United States. The

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<sup>2</sup> V. I. Herr and M. Speer, *The European Union needs its own army*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2022/05/18/european-union-army-ukraine/?fbclid=IwAR2mDZF3P01-C3egsAuBZ6z9PUvn71G3TLzYywBWdA1D14jljDbAM--wuE4> [accessed: 25.11.2022].

combined military expenditure of twenty-six states within the union (as Denmark withdrew from the all the E.U. military projects) is as high as 200 billion euros<sup>3</sup>, yet Europe does not act as one on defence – due to the fragmentation and the lack of proper coordination and effective planning, the number does not translate to neither to Europe's strength, nor to convincingness as far as security is concerned. Its military strength today is far weaker than the sum of its parts – the current problems plaguing European defence are structural and regard fragmentation, as each European country has its own distinct national military, leading to inefficiency<sup>4</sup>.

Centralization, as a product of further European integration, would seem like a solution to the European Union's security issues. Moreover, the establishment of autonomous European army would enhance the continent's sovereignty, not only in the military, but also political context and would be the step towards the E.U. independence from Washington, as currently NATO remains the only reliable safety guarantor. Overdependency on the Western ally precludes Europe's growth of importance in the international arena as a geopolitical actor and, in some ways, prevents pan-European trends among the continent's leaders. It also raises a question about European identity, as well as the future of its development – the pride of European leaders and citizens has its fundamentals in widely understood heterogeneity, hence the transnational integration stands a challenging procedure in regards of multi-level governance. However, striving for political homogeneity seems to be a solution for improving the condition of Europe security, as well as its stance in international relations. The diversity impacts European political consciousness, therefore it appears to be the cause of military fragmentation, especially if the differences between the state members' strategic cultures are taken under consideration. To quote an analyst Ester Sabatino, "there is the desire to protect

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<sup>3</sup> R. Emmott, *Record EU defence spending masks failure to collaborate, report says*, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/record-eu-defence-spending-masks-failure-collaborate-report-says-2021-12-06/> [accessed: 25.11.2022].

<sup>4</sup> M. Bergmann, J. Lamond, et. al., *The Case for EU Defense. A New Way Forward for Trans-Atlantic Security Relations*, [https://www.americanprogress.org/article/case-eu-defense/?fbclid=IwAR2gDfnFuVSEVLd7vK2-DKSAU\\_Snqlae\\_gQPbA-PwfE0ardqhg7idc2EEQ](https://www.americanprogress.org/article/case-eu-defense/?fbclid=IwAR2gDfnFuVSEVLd7vK2-DKSAU_Snqlae_gQPbA-PwfE0ardqhg7idc2EEQ) [accessed: 25.11.2022].

national defence industries and champions. There is the temptation to spend money on off-the-shelf products that are at the cutting-edge of technology. And there is the impulse to cement defence partnerships beyond the E.U. These factors contribute to the current situation”<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, Europeans consider themselves, first, citizens of their country, then citizens of the European Union<sup>6</sup>. However, according to Eurobarometer, “77% of Europeans are in favour of a common defence and security policy among E.U. Member States, with a majority in favour of such a policy in each Member State, according to this Standard Eurobarometer survey, conducted between 18 January and 14 February 2022”. After the outbreak of war in Ukraine, it has been also reported that there is increased trust of citizens in the E.U., and continued support for the European Union’s response to the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Yet, defence acquisitions still mainly occur at the national level and joint procurement represented only 11 percent of the total armament acquisition of E.U. member states in 2020<sup>7</sup>.

## **THE ACTIONS**

When Russia attacked Ukraine in February 2022, defence budgets started to rise across the E.U. member states. The E.U. member states opinions on security matter differ significantly from one another on security matter<sup>8</sup>, nevertheless, some measures have already been taken within the union policy since last February. In March 2022, the European leaders adopted the Versailles declaration treating about the E.U.’s responsibilities to protect its citizens, values and democracies and the European model. It also reaffirms the leaders’ commitment to take more responsibility for the union's

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<sup>5</sup> B. Giegerich, E. Sabatino, *The (Sorry) State of EU Defense Cooperation*, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/88104?fbclid=IwAR1r2hVE3WzofuL9rCZkz5v44XwSJ69YPlbjFj-7DBsRG1ug64lAupjl4SQ> [accessed: 25.11.2022].

<sup>6</sup> See: Eurobarometer, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/> [accessed: 25.11.2022].

<sup>7</sup> See: European Defence Agency, *Defence Data 2019-2020: Key findings and analysis*.

<sup>8</sup> E. Braw, *Is an EU Army Coming?*, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/20/is-an-eu-army-coming/?fbclid=IwAR1DCV6HjZ5DB5jTis8rWjfnlCreTiKvjwmgQJMa1wJj83Nb22pueF-UWQ> [accessed: 25.11.2022].

own security, as well as to pursue a strategic course of action in defence, while highlighting the autonomy of decision-making and addressing three dimensions: (i) bolstering defence capabilities; (ii) reducing our energy dependencies; and (iii) building a more robust economic base<sup>9</sup>. Although the importance of NATO was still emphasized in the declaration, as we read, it was “decided that the European Union would take more responsibility for its own security and, in the field of defence, pursue a strategic course of action and increase its capacity to act autonomously. The transatlantic relationship and E.U.–NATO cooperation, in full respect of the principles set out in the Treaties and those agreed by the European Council, including the principles of inclusiveness, reciprocity and decision-making autonomy of the E.U., are key to our overall security. A stronger and more capable E.U. in the field of security and defence will contribute positively to global and transatlantic security and is complementary to NATO, which remains the foundation of collective defence for its members”<sup>10</sup>.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of March, the Council formally approved the Strategic Compass, which gives the European Union a plan of action for strengthening the E.U.'s security and defence policy by the year of 2030<sup>11</sup>. The first version of the Strategic Compass was tabled by the High Representative already in November last year, based on the first ever threat analysis to which the intelligence services of the member states contributed. Its objective is to make the union a stronger and more capable security provider. The Compass consists of four pillars – (i) act; (ii) invest; (iii) partner; and (iv) secure. The priority actions involve commitment in terms of, *inter alia*, establishing rapid deployment capacity up to 5000 troops, enhancing military mobility, boosting intelligence analysis capacity, developing security strategy within the union, as well as strengthening cooperation with strategic partners such as NATO, the UN and regional partners, including the OSCE, AU

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<sup>9</sup> Council of the European Union, *The Versailles Declaration*, March 2022, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>11</sup> Council of the European Union, *A Strategic Compass for a stronger EU security and defence in the next decade*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/03/21/a-strategic-compass-for-a-stronger-eu-security-and-defence-in-the-next-decade/> [accessed: 25.11.2022].



and ASEAN<sup>12</sup>. Later that month, the E.U. leaders held a strategic debate on security and defence, endorsed the Strategic Compass and invited the Council to start implementing it<sup>13</sup>.

On the 17th of May, the E.U. Defence Innovation Scheme and the Hub for European Defence Innovation has been established by EDA Defence Ministers. This decision came after the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence which had called for the creation of such a Hub in 2022. HEDI objective is to operate “at the intersection of EDA’s already existing innovation activities, serving as a catalyst and amplifier”, while being based on three pillars: (i) identification of innovative ideas and innovators; (ii) implementation of these ideas; (iii) outreach to increase the awareness of the solutions produced and their application to the defence domain . It is worth noticing, that the E.U. Defence Innovation Scheme and the Hub for European Defence Innovation would also stand a great unit for technology and industry innovation development.

In June 2022, Council adopted conclusions on a framework for a coordinated E.U. response to hybrid campaigns. The objective of it was to endorse the Strategic Compass and to develop the E.U. Hybrid Toolbox. The toolbox is supposed to bring together “all relevant actors, policies and instruments to counter the impact of hybrid threats in a more coordinated manner.” In July, the European Commission announced the European Defence Industry Reinforcement through common Procurement Act (EDIPRA), which aims at reducing barriers to cooperation and providing incentives for joint procurement through cost saving and financial support<sup>14</sup>. It was declared that by the end of 2022, the Commission will also present the E.U. Defence Investment Programme (EDIP)

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<sup>12</sup> See: Council of the European Union, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence*, March 2022.

<sup>13</sup> *Timeline: EU cooperation on security and defence*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/defence-security/defence-security-timeline/?fbclid=IwAR3cOm6YnMKTG4nuYbkYD1K0hNnK0I77i2h-mvVj4fbcTMG9kxN7Lsqa-SM> [accessed: 25.11.2022].

<sup>14</sup> B. Giegerich, E. Sabatino, *op. cit.*

regulation that should further reduce forementioned barriers through a VAT exemption<sup>15</sup>.

## **CONCLUSION**

Undoubtedly, above mentioned European initiatives are likely to change the perspective on the union's defence strategy, yet it is necessary to notice that they all require a certain level of member states' commitment regarding shared responsibility of the implementation. The E.U. policy makers' tendency of making exceptions does not create a potential for maintaining the intended effects. Unanimity and unity in regards of security seems vital in the times of crisis, however, such phenomena appear as a rarity within a state, let alone a heterogeneous union. Strengthening European defence capacity is now depending on addressing the continuing fragmentation. For now, however, it seems like further integration of the union has not been the most concerning issue for the European leaders, who hope to achieve satisfactory security capacity by expanding the budget and industrial technology innovation development instead of working on unifying various strategic cultures of the state members into one political narration which seems necessary to implement long-lasting defence policy.

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<sup>15</sup> *Defence industry: EU to reinforce the European defence industry through common procurement with a €500 million instrument*, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_22\\_4491](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_4491) [accessed: 29.11.2022].

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